

# HOW MANAGERS LEARN WHEN THEIR ORGANISATIONS GO THROUGH CHANGE

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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## **Abstract**

A review of the learning literature reveals the current lack of a viable theory of how people learn when they encounter change in the workplace. This thesis presents a new model of learning that describes how people learn in response to changes in their environment.

The research tracked the learning of twenty-one managers and staff from two organisations implementing change programmes. Participants recorded their learning in monthly diaries whilst interviews were conducted at the beginning and end of the year. Learning as an outcome was defined as any change in behaviour, cognition or emotional orientation towards a cue. Learning outcomes for each participant were identified and the learning process was then tracked through the interviews and monthly diaries.

The research identifies four core learning processes that appear in **all** instances of learning: paying attention, responding emotionally, making sense of ‘cues’ and taking action. Learning is said to have taken place when these four processes are engaged in such a way as to lead to emotional, behavioural or cognitive change. We then ask the question – what motivates people to engage these processes in ways that lead to learning and change? We noted that learning is both driven and inhibited by four important needs - the desire to achieve important goals, achieve psychological well-being, fulfil personal values and establish self-esteem. Finally, we identify five different learning states, showing how the underlying dynamic driving these processes differs according to the degree of control exercised over the learning process.

The research goes on to describe the detailed dynamics that illustrate this theory. We conclude that learning, particularly in response to change, is a far more complex process than many current models suggest. We attempt to encapsulate this complexity in our own learning model and then suggest possible area for future research.

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## Chapter 1. My Personal Interest in Learning

This research had its genesis in a particular incident, although I was not aware of its full significance at the time. I was working as an external consultant for a bank in a City dealing room. The bank was going through a merger bringing together traders from two entirely different backgrounds - 'Harrow vs. Barrow', as the traders termed it.

I was asked to come in and run an event to help the traders from the 'Barrow' part of the Bank. These were older men who had come into the dealing room in the 1970's as part of their domestic banking training. Most of them had left school at 16 or 18; none had attended university. They had spent their formative years growing up together in what was then a very rarified, mysterious world, incomprehensible to outsiders. Very quickly an 'insider vs. outsider' culture evolved. The 'insider' culture was tough, macho, sexist and aggressive. This left 'outsiders' fearful of approaching traders who were known for their swearing, aggression and intolerance.

When we ran the event I was unprepared for what happened! People erupted in uncontrolled outbursts of anger – and they appeared to direct it all at us! Having recovered from the shock, I was completely intrigued by the behaviour I observed. Why were these people so angry? Why could they not accept that the bank, and their trading room had to change in line with the changes brought in by Big Bang? Why were they so hostile and so irrational, many of them denying the very existence of structural changes such as changes in the law and in the market.

I must have been intrigued as, following this event, I went and worked for the bank! I wanted to see how people coped with change – both market driven and culture driven. It was in this highly emotional environment that I began to see how complex human change actually is. I saw people acting in ways that would bring about the outcome that they most feared – but they still could not change their behaviour. They could not even change the way they viewed events – the anger and fear seemed to hinder their ability to adapt to what was going on around them.

As I looked around to try and find answers to ‘why’ change seemed so difficult I became dissatisfied. ‘Training’ didn’t seem to take into account the fact that people often did not want to change their behaviour.

I became intrigued by the notion of defensiveness. I attended some courses in Gestalt and group dynamics at the Tavistock Institute. Whilst this experience revealed the importance of emotions it did not reveal the precise role played by emotions in learning and how learning, emotions and personal change were related.

I left the bank and then became involved in some high profile change programmes run by a major national airline. Culture change was the big thing – and Americans were brought in to ‘change’ people’s hearts and minds. I saw an approach to change that was highly unitarist. There was an assumption that the desired behavioural change was obvious and rational. That all one had to do was to let people ‘grieve’ for the past, express their emotions, go through the change curve and then come out the other end when everybody would come round to the realisation that change was best.

Even action learning was patchy – sometimes facilitating change and other times just ‘fizzling out’. The assumption that people would learn to change by addressing live, on-the-job issues was not always the case. Often people would feel that they had changed immensely, yet their managers could see no change at all. Sometimes people simply did not change or changed in unhelpful ways – becoming more depressed, more cynical, more angry.

By the end of this whole period I was totally confused. There appeared to be lots of interventions designed to facilitate learning and change but none were based upon a comprehensive theory of learning. The theories of learning that were most popular seemed to be based upon assumptions and preferences rather than on empirical research (e.g. NLP). In the academic literature the most widely used had come under sustained criticism (i.e. experiential learning). They were often partial – focusing on emotions **or** behaviour **or** experience.

I was left with a relatively simple question: ‘how do people learn when their organisations go through change?’. At this point, I decided to conduct further research and this PhD was born.

### **The Roadmap**

At this point it may be helpful to have a road map of the structure.

Chapter two simply covers the literature review and shows how I arrived at my research question. In this chapter I define the question that drives my research and show how it relates to gaps in the literature.

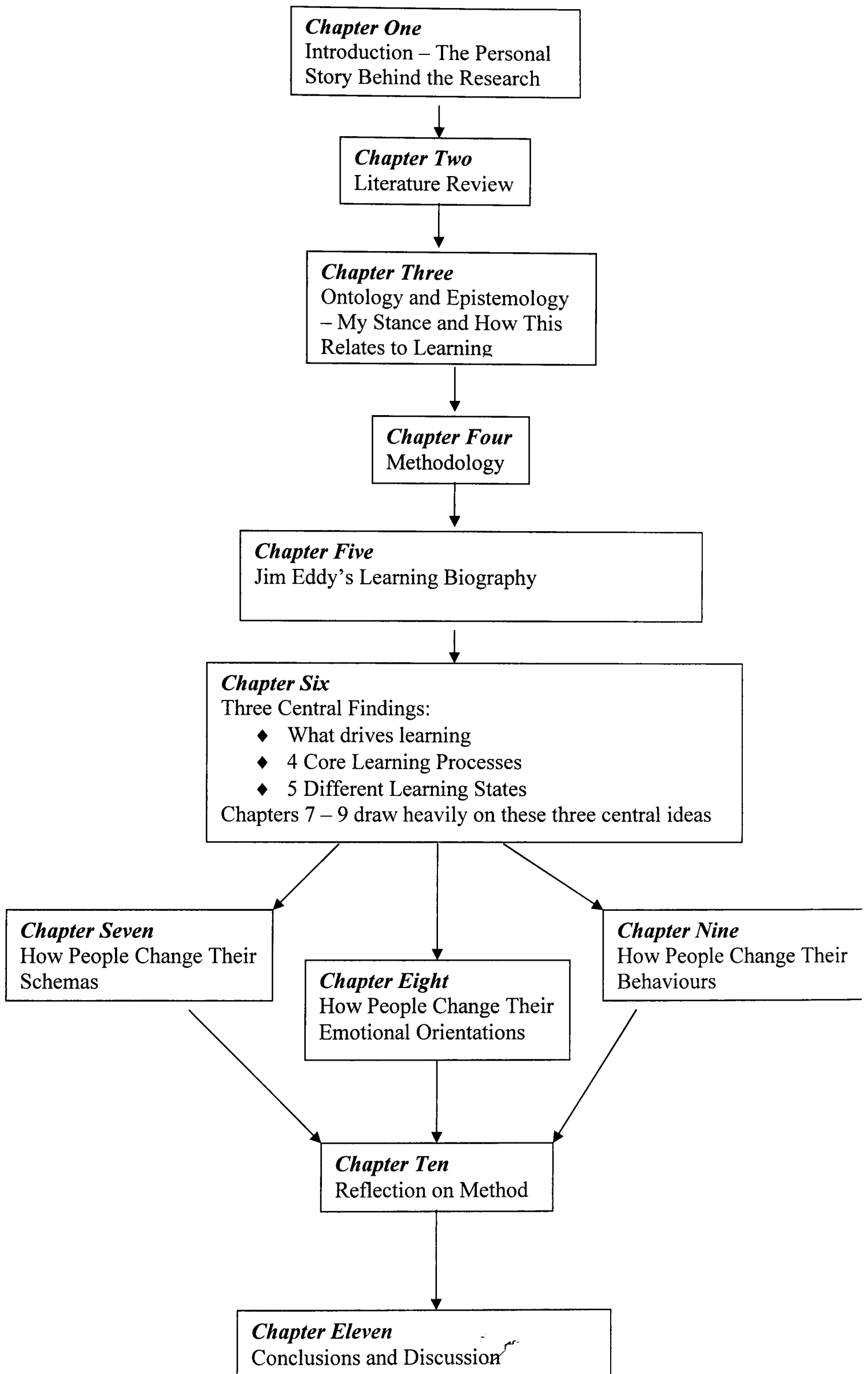
The third chapter is an overview of ontology and epistemology and outlines the approach I take and why. The fourth chapter concerns my methodology.

Chapter five provides an example of an individual learning biography. Each of the 21 participants ended up with a learning biography which mapped their personal learning over the year. These biographies were over 50 pages long. Clearly, these could not all be included in the main body of the PhD so this chapter provides an example with the remainder included in the appendices.

The three over-arching ideas I present in chapter six comprise the main findings of this thesis. Together, they comprise the basics of a new theory of learning which I draw on extensively in chapters 7 – 10. In chapters 7 – 10 I apply this theory to reveal in much greater detail how people change their beliefs/schemas, emotional orientations and behaviours.

Finally, chapter eleven, summarises the conclusions, discusses the results and suggests some area for future research.

The following diagram is intended to provide an at-a-glance roadmap through the thesis so that the argument is easier to follow:



## Chapter Two                      Perspectives on Learning

### *2.1 Introduction*

The history of research in learning strongly mirrors the development of psychology as a whole. The study of learning has been strongly influenced by psychology's attempts to establish itself as a scientific discipline and the subsequent debates and factionalism this has entailed. As a result the literature on learning consists of disparate and often competitive disciplines (Reber, 1993). Because the research on learning spans a number of competing paradigms and communities it is difficult to track. Nevertheless we shall attempt to make sense of this by constructing a certain 'narrative' around the research on *management* learning. This narrative is not 'true', but is simply a way of making sense of the conflicting and contrasting debates in the field. It also helps to reveal where this research 'fits' in the ongoing debates around management learning.

The 'story' of learning within the field of psychology (as opposed to philosophy) begins with the behaviourists. In an attempt to bolster the 'scientific' credibility of their discipline, behaviourists restricted the study of learning to observable outputs – in practice this meant behaviour change. This led to research that focused on how new behaviours were generated via the process of conditioning. The 'cognitive revolution' in the 50's, spurred by a rising interest in computers, rejected the exclusive focus on behaviour and highlighted the importance of mental or cognitive processes. Extreme cognitive approaches to learning viewed the processes of learning and computer processing as directly analogous. In reaction to this, humanists writing in the 1960's reclaimed the learning debate for the emotions and the spirit, drawing on psycho-dynamic approaches to learning. During the 70's and 80's, an increasingly performative focus led once more to a focus on pragmatism. Revans, increased in popularity and together with Kolb formed the intellectual and practical foundations of experiential learning. The focus here was on how managers learned practically on the job. This approach emphasised the relationship between intellectual problem solving and taking action. During the 80's and 90's both humanist and experiential approaches to learning came under attack. Social constructionists attacked the humanist emphasis on the self and highlighted the social



aspect of learning de-emphasising both the role of individual agency and psychological constructs such as self actualisation and identity. Critical writers attacked the fundamentally unitarist values underlying both humanist and experiential learning approaches. At the same time, inspired by writers such as Derrida, Baudrillard and Foucault, postmodern and critical theorists began to shift the focus away from learning as a process towards learning as content. These theorists were much more interested in *what should* be learned and focused their attention on the pedagogic methods that would successfully convey their agenda. As a result of this focus on content, interest in learning as a process declined; in fact, critical and postmodern theorists make very little reference to how managers learn. Learning is viewed as the natural, tacit absorption of assumptions contained within dominant discourses and language games.

By the end of the century, the theories of learning that were still being alluded to by academics and used by practitioners had been systematically discredited. After a hundred years of research we still had no widely accepted theory of learning. Moreover, it appeared as if in the terrain of management learning at least, psychologists were in decline. Sociologists appeared to dominate the field and there seemed to be a lack of interest in researching a new theory of learning to guide further development in the field.

\* \* \*

Now, this 'story' is of course a construction! The terrain is far more complex and multi-faceted. Behaviourism, for example, still exerts considerable influence today in the form of the competency movement. Nevertheless, it is a helpful construction and gives some type of focus as we enter into the various discourses. It also suggests where I see this research contributing to the field – the development of a more viable, robust theory of learning.

## ***2.2 The Behavioural Tradition – Learning as Conditioning***

### ***Operant Conditioning – Pavlov***

Pavlov (1849-1936) is traditionally seen as one of the founders of behaviourism (Hill, 1997). Pavlov showed how a subject could learn to generate a particular response to a given object or stimulus. The subject would first be presented with a stimulus that would generate an automatic response (e.g. food would generate saliva). These were termed the unconditioned stimulus and response. Just before the presentation of the unconditioned stimulus, however, a new stimulus (such as a bell) would be presented. This was termed the conditioned stimulus. When repeated enough times, the subject would learn to generate the salivation in response to the conditioned stimulus or bell. The subject had thus learned to generate a conditioned response (salivation) to a conditioned stimulus (the bell).

Pavlov explained his findings by referring to connections forged in the brain. The unconditioned stimulus (food) would excite the region in the brain associated with the unconditioned response (salivation). At the same time an area of the brain responding to the bell would be excited. Having stimulated these areas of the brain simultaneously on a number of occasions, Pavlov proposed that connections were forged between them. The connections could be weakened or strengthened according to various patterns of repetition.

### ***Skinner and Operant Conditioning***

Skinner (1904- 1990) introduced the distinction between classical conditioning and operant conditioning. The latter is behaviour that is generated by the subject in order to acquire a particular consequence. Learning takes place when a behaviour is rewarded in some way. Under operant conditioning, learning is generated when a behaviour elicits a reward and is repeated in order to elicit that reward once more. According to Skinner, operant conditioning is the most important type of learning as a large part of human behaviour consists of it. Skinner's influence has been widespread due in part to his concern with practical application. Behaviour modification has been influential in the areas of psychotherapy, counselling and education.

Behaviourism also exercised a strong influence over management education and development. This is particularly apparent in the focus on ‘objectives’ in learning during the 1970’s and 80’s. It also affected the growth of the competency movement during the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century which focused on behaviours as manifestations of both innate and learned capabilities.

### ***Gagne – Applying Behaviourism to Management Learning***

Gagne (1916-2002) had a background in military training and went on to specialise in adult training and instructional design. His emphasis on the need for training to be structured around specific behavioural objectives influenced approaches to management training in the 1970’s and still holds sway today. Acknowledging that people are engaged in learning all the time and that “instruction which is deliberately planned will affect only a part, perhaps a small part of what each person learns” (Gagne, 1974:3), he nevertheless believed that:

“Learning must be planned, rather than haphazard, so that each person will come closer to the goals of optimal use of his talents, enjoyment of life, and integration with his physical and social environment”.

This could only be achieved however if the instruction was “based upon knowledge of how human beings learn” (Gagne, 1974:5). In describing how human beings learn, Gagne drew upon stimulus response theories, emphasising the importance of ‘contiguity’ between stimulus and response, repetition of the stimulus response pattern and the need for reinforcement or reward.

Despite Gagne’s incorporation of information processing theories and his acknowledgement of an affective element to learning (in the form of ‘attitudes’), everything is ultimately reduced to behaviour. Even an attitude is reduced to a “class of learned capabilities” (1974:25) or “choice of action” (1974:29). An attitude can be **observed** in terms of the behaviours manifested by the learner in relation to the object of the attitude.

Gagne posits nine basic steps in learning. These are described below in terms of the instructional procedure that should be paired with each step in the learning process:

<b>Instructional Procedure</b>	<b>Learning Process</b>
1. Gain attention	Reception
2. Inform learners of the objective	Expectancy
3. Stimulate recall of prior learning	Retrieval
4. Present the stimulus	Selective perception
5. Provide learning guidance	Semantic encoding
6. Elicit performance	Responding
7. Provide feedback	Reinforcement
8. Assess performance	Retrieval
9. Enhance retention and transfer	Generalisation

By using the above procedure Gagne describes the conditions under which any knowledge, skill or attitude can be ‘trained’ and learned.

This approach to learning led to management development being based upon the assumption that knowledge, skills and attitudes can be deliberately trained. Even attitudes could be specified in terms of their behavioural outcomes and trained. Management training was designed around the ‘correct’ definition of behavioural objectives, the delivery of training in terms of a series of cumulative steps and the subsequent evaluation of training in relation to the specified objectives (see for example, Goldstein and Sorcher, 1974; Goldstein, 1986; Buckley and Caple, 1990). Learning is assumed to take place given the properly specified objectives (capable of being manifested behaviourally), a supportive training environment (one that provides appropriate reinforcement) and properly sequenced learning opportunities.

The main problem associated with this approach to training was the problem of transfer (Goldstein, 1986; Buckley and Caple, 1990). Behaviours generated in the training environment would not necessarily get transferred to the real world. Despite this however, the focus on behavioural objectives remained an influential approach to management development until the preoccupation with ‘change’ began to dominate the field during the 1980’s. The growing emphasis on culture and change

management shifted the emphasis away from ‘training’ to a focus on values and leadership. It was during the onset of rapid organisational change that Gagne’s neglect of the motivational and emotional aspects of learning revealed a deep weakness in the ‘training’ approach to learning. The questions emerging from organisational change coalesced around concerns with resistance to learning - ‘what happens if people do not want to learn?’ and ‘why do people resist change?’ Gagne had of course placed at the centre of this theory the assumption that adults would be motivated to learn what was presented to them providing they had respect for the ‘trainer’ or human model. The problem of motivation to learn was not addressed by Gagne. We will see later that the psycho-therapeutic tradition has more to say in this area. However, before we examine this we will look at the cognitive approaches to learning.

### ***2.3 The Cognitive Revolution - Learning as Information Processing***

For behaviourists, the *outcome* of learning was always manifested in behavioural change - either new behaviours altogether or new stimulus response patterns. The *process* of learning comprised the juxtaposition of stimulus and response. This approach to learning theory dominated academic (as opposed to clinical) psychology for over 50 years (Eysenck and Keane 1990; Gardner 1985; Hill 1997).

There seems to be a general consensus that the so-called cognitive revolution dates from around the middle of the century (Gardner, 1985; Eysenck and Keene, 1990; Miller, 1979; Newall and Simon, 1972). We will look at some of the assumptions underlying cognitive approaches before looking at two different approaches in the field, both of which have influenced modern approaches to individual and organisational learning.

#### ***Assumptions***

According to Gardner (1985) the subject of cognitive science is that of “mental representations”. The computer serves as a viable model of how the human mind functions and as a result cognitive science de-emphasises factors such as emotion.

Cognition is the science of what the behaviourists would term the ‘intervening variable’ and, as such, makes a significant break with the behavioural tradition. The subject here is the functioning of the human mind as it is experienced in thought processes. Behaviour is not the issue - thought is.

### ***Two Trends in Cognitive Psychology – Learning as Information Processing and Learning as Schema Development***

In order to make some sense of how cognitive psychologists have influenced the field of organisational and individual learning we will focus on two distinct trends. These have grown from the same early cognitive roots (e.g. Broadbent, 1958; Newell and Simon, 1972; Bruner, Goodnow & Austin, 1956) but have ended with vastly differing assumptions and methods.

One trend is connected to the field of artificial intelligence. Some take the analogy of mind and computer as literal and can see the process of knowledge acquisition in a somewhat mechanistic fashion. Despite its contemporaneous critics however (e.g. Neisser 1976), this pure form of information processing has had a significant influence on how learning is construed.

The second trend has focused on the concept of the Kantian notion of a schema. There are a number of different terms for a schema (mental model, cognitive map, frame), but they all refer to how individuals organise their experience and knowledge. A number of researchers popularised the schema approach (Shank and Abelson, 1977; Eden, Jones and Sims, 1979; Poole, Gioia and Gray, 1989; Weick, 1990; Fiske and Taylor, 1991; Gioia, 1992;). It also received a boost in the 1990’s with the renewed interest ‘cognitive maps’ in relation to strategy and systems (e.g. Huff, 1990).

### ***Learning as Information Processing***

The most important development in cognitive science was the design and development of the computer (Gardner, 1985; Hill, 1997). Computers seemed to be able to perform many of the tasks associated with human cognitive processes - storage of information, problem solving, computation. Just as important, many of the founders of cognitive science were the first to use computer systems to mimic human

thinking processes. Researchers such as Broadbent, (1958), Ashby (1952), von Neumann (1958) and Putnam (1960) published works proposing that humans process information in much the same way as a computer.

The ‘mind as computer’ model became somewhat mechanistic and was often ridiculed. Neisser (1976) attributed much of the low quality work in cognitive sciences to the mechanistic information processing models:

“the villains of the piece are the mechanistic information-processing models, which treat the mind as a fixed-capacity device for converting discrete and meaningless inputs into conscious percepts” (Neisser, 1976)

Neisser introduced the notion of the individual as a ‘top down processor’. Critical of the unquestioning way in which cognitive scientists and psychologists equated the computer and the human mind, he demonstrated how people bring with them goals, expectations and beliefs that affect how and even *if* they perceive given stimuli:

“Unlike men, “artificially intelligent” programs tend to be single-minded, undistractable, and unemotional” (Neisser, 1976)

According to Neisser, perception is an active and constructive process. Perception involves the activation of goals, expectations and previous knowledge in order to make ‘inferences’ about stimuli in the environment. Since perception is influenced by prior beliefs and expectations, it will be prone to error. This has led to extensive research showing the cognitive limitations of the human mind in comparison to that of a computer (see below).

Nevertheless, the information processing analogy is continues to be used in areas such as strategy (Stubbart, 1989; Porac, Thomas and Baden-Fuller, 1989; Reger and Palmer, 1996), learning (MacDonald, 1995; Walsh, 1995; Thompson and Hunt, 1996; Bartunek and Moch, 1987) and organisational change/learning (Reger et al. 1994; Louis and Sutton, 1991; Spicer, 1998; Barr, Stimpert and Huff, 1992).

### ***Learning and the Formation of Schemas***

A schema can be defined as a “cognitive structure that represents knowledge about a concept or type of stimulus, including its attributes and the relations amongst those attributes” (Fiske and Taylor, 1991). Schemas fulfil a number of purposes. They allow us to generalise our experience in larger chunks, facilitating memory recall, (Friedman, 1979). They offer quick ways of understanding a novel situation or stimulus (Schank and Abelson, 1977). They enable us to predict likely future scenarios and to infer what is implicit in a situation (Fiske and Taylor 1991). Essentially, schemas simplify and code knowledge through the process of generalisation and in so doing facilitate the subsequent understanding and categorisation of new stimuli.

### ***Schema Formation***

Fundamental to any research on knowledge organisation is the proposal that “we divide the world into classes of things to decrease the amount of information we must learn, perceive, remember, and recognise” (Eysenck and Keene, 1990).

The generation of schemas is a basic human process. Essentially it comprises the storing of experience and the formation of constructs, relationships, rules and classifications in order to inform subsequent sense-making. These rules and heuristics are influenced partly by the social and cultural artefacts through which they are communicated and partly through personal experience.

Schemas are comprised of a number of constructs and the relationships between them (Eysenck and Keene, 1990; Fiske and Taylor, 1991; Taylor and Crocker, 1981). They are highly flexible in that the constructs are left loosely defined and hence can be applied to diverse circumstances (Fiske and Taylor, 1991). Hence social schema research has tended to discover generic typologies of schema such as ‘person’, ‘self’, ‘role’, and ‘event’ schemas.

The presentation of schema development in this way then differentiates it from the classic, mechanistic information processing approach to knowledge development. Using more mechanistic metaphors, given the same stimuli two ‘processors’ should produce the same responses. Schemas allow for human agency and experience in



constructing learning. Also they help to account for idiosyncrasies, subjectivity, bias and distortion in human information processing in a way that classic computational approaches cannot. Hence the emphasis shifts from bottom up processing to top down processing.

### ***Schema Change and Learning***

The need to change and replace old schema with new received more attention in the 1980's and 90's. This derived from the need to address fundamental economic, cultural and social problems in the new globally competitive world. New paradigms abounded to replace old, so-called outdated ways of running businesses, government institutions and public organisations (Moss Kanter, 1983; Senge, 1990; Slater and Narver, 1994).

It became apparent however, that people do not easily change their schemas despite the changes going on around them (Reger and Palmer 1996).

In order to help explain this apparent paradox, Bartunek and Moch (1987) used the notion of first order and second order schema change. First order change occurred as schemas were expanded and elaborated as they incorporated new information. Second order change occurred when a stimulus was encountered that conflicted with the existing schema. This stimulus could be ignored or reconceptualised to fit in with the existing schema. However, if this did not occur, the schema would have to be re-organised in a fundamental way in order to incorporate the new stimulus. This is termed second order change. This is a very common distinction (Argyris and Schon, 1978; Senge, 1990; Dodgson, 1991; Fiol and Lyles, 1985) and the distinction between first and second order change now seems to be widely accepted in the literature (Miner and Mezias, 1996).

This is supported by work done on the type of processing that seems to provoke first or second order change. Processing may be either data driven or schema driven. In the first case the perceiver is open to data present in the environment. In the second case the perceiver is driven by pre-existing schema and is therefore more subject to perceptual biases and distortions. Data driven processing is more 'conscious' and effortful. Schema driven processing is more unconscious, automatic and effortless.

Still there seems to be little work on the circumstances that provoke first or second order change, or schema vs. data driven processing.

### ***Cognitive Bias and Distortion***

One of the areas in cognitive psychology that has been particularly influential when looking at adult learning has been the notion of the cognitive limitations of the human mind. The idea that the human mind is not as efficient as the computer, and that schemas distort and bias information processing has led to extensive research looking at the limits of human rationality:

1. we are limited in the amount of information we can process and handle (Simon 1957). Hence we will satisfice in certain situations, taking in only as much information as appears necessary in order to act.
2. we have perceptual biases that direct our attention towards some things and away from others. In particular, we notice things that confirm what we already believe (Reger and Palmer, 1996; Sutherland 1992); we repress things that we find threatening (Reger and Palmer, 1996; Stubbart, 1989), we tend to notice things that are surprising or salient (Kiesler and Sproull, 1982) but our expectations will also lead us towards noticing things in line with those expectations e.g. confirmation bias (Fiske and Taylor, 1991; Kiesler and Sproull, 1982; Sutherland 1992), the source of a stimulus will affect how we react to it; stress will affect how much information we pay attention to (Le Doux, 1998; Sutherland, 1992).
3. We have biases in the way in which we interpret information. Amongst some of the most common are: illusory correlation and causation - perceiving stimuli to be correlative or causative due to chance or false association of events, (Kiesler and Sproull, 1982); bias towards perceiving in-groups as more varied and complex than outgroups (Fiske and Taylor 1991:123); attributional biases (Fiske and Taylor: 66-93) bias towards perceiving consistency in behaviour and attitudes (Festinger, 1957); bias towards interpreting stimuli according to schema that are more readily 'available' i.e. the recency and primacy effects (Sutherland, 1992). We also have biases that favour maintenance of our own self esteem at the expense of others (Fiske and Taylor, 1991: 78-86)
- 4) We suffer from what Dawes (1976) calls "cognitive conceit" which is "an inflated

belief in our judgmental abilities”. This leads to a tendency to misjudge risk (Slovic, Fischhoff and Lichtenstein, 1976) and avoid taking responsibility for our errors.

The problem with cognitive theories of learning is that on the one hand they construe the human mind as like a machine and on the other hand they have to make exceptions because the human mind is not a machine. This stems in part from the almost complete absence of emotion in the work on cognition. Recourse is made to ‘satisficing’, limited information capacity’, and ‘cognitive bias’ in order to explain illogical or irrational processing of information. Whilst this appears to have solid research support (see above) it cannot say when and why we distort our information processing and when and why we do not. More importantly it can offer us little in the way of a theory of human adaptation and change. Whilst cognitive theories suggest that we are limited in our ability to take in new information from the environment and change our schemas accordingly, it cannot explain why sometimes we are able to do this effectively and sometimes we are not. It selects out a manifestly important fact about individuals – that they teem with emotion (Hochschild 1993; Hirshhorn, 1995; Kets de Vries, 1984; Fineman, 1993). Learning is intimately connected with emotion and a theory that selects out emotion as a fundamental part of its assumptive structure, is limited in what it can say about how people in learn from their experience. This becomes clearer when we examine psychotherapeutic approaches to learning which place human emotion at the centre of their theories.

#### ***2.4 Psychotherapeutic and Humanist Accounts of Learning – Learning as Self Actualisation***

At the same time that behavioural and cognitive psychology were investigating learning, psycho-analysis had followed a completely separate course which was more focused on clinical practice and less concerned with classical scientific notions of ‘proof’. As Colledge, (2002) puts it:

“Psychoanalysis remained isolated from the scientific and philosophical communities for a long time, and so retained an invalidated methodology that was vague and intuitive rather than being an applied science” (2002: 25)

This isolation also manifested itself in terms of different language and goals. Psychoanalysis as elaborated by Freud and his intellectual descendants did not refer to learning. Instead it focused on ‘change’. Learning is equated to personal change that involves shedding defences and moving towards psychological well-being.

### ***The Freudian Model***

The human mind according to Freud is comprised of the id, the ego and the super-ego. The id is the primary outlet for the basic life and death instincts that are present in us all from birth. The life instincts include self-preservation, preservation of the species, ego love and object love. The death instinct is comprised of the will of all living things to return to death and is mainly seen in terms of human aggression.

Whilst the id is involved in a never-ending struggle to fulfil these basic instincts the super-ego, which represents parentally inculcated values, serves to try and constrain them. For Freud the id and the superego were constantly at odds, battling for dominance of the ego. This battle leads to two forms of anxiety – moral anxiety emanating from the demands of the super-ego and neurotic anxiety emanating from the demands of the id. A third form of anxiety arises from the demands of the external world which the ego has to meet in order to achieve its goals:

“These three agencies are in a varying state of harmony or conflict at any given time. Psychological well-being depends on whether or not they interrelate effectively” (Colledge,2002: 14)

The ego has a tendency to repress instincts that are perceived as dangerous or anxiety-provoking. Once repressed, the ego can no longer deal with them and they may manifest themselves in the form of unconscious drives and urges.

In order to restore well-being the client goes through therapy which to all intents and purposes is a structured learning process. The goals of therapy are to “free impulses,

to strengthen reality-based ego functioning...and to move the superego away from punitive moral standards and towards more human standards....” (Colledge, 2002:21).

This is achieved by accessing the unconscious via such mechanisms as free-association. Once this is done the client is encouraged to interpret the material that emerges in order to recognise, acknowledge and understand some of the impulses contributing towards the psychological imbalance.

In sum, learning, within the psychoanalytic tradition involves the process of bringing to consciousness repressed urges and instincts in order to better live with and manage them. It is a process of gradual self awareness and self acceptance. Whilst there is an emphasis on *understanding* repressed instincts, the process is highly *emotional*. The client has to overcome high levels of anxiety in order to recognise and accept what has been repressed and feared.

This is a very different model of learning compared to cognitive and behavioural models. The learning process involves a battle between the conscious and the unconscious, the reality principle and the pleasure principle. It is not simply a process of absorbing data from the external world and storing it in memory. Nor is it a simple matter of being shown behaviours, copying them and having them reinforced. Learning is a complex interaction between external reality and the capacity or desire of the learner to cope with that external reality. The learner regulates precisely how much reality he or she can cope with and one of the key determinants of this is the level of anxiety the learner can tolerate. For Freud, learning involved a degree of pain or discomfort and hence there was always an incentive for the learner to avoid it. The issue for Freud is how to overcome the individual's natural defence *against* learning.

### ***The Rogerian Model – People as Self Actualisers***

Around the 1940's, Carl Rogers, whilst influenced by Freud, introduced a new set of assumptions to psychotherapy and counselling. Following Jung, Rogers held a more optimistic view of human nature and in so doing helped give rise to the humanist movement that has exercised much influence in terms of current learning theory.

According to Rogers “all individuals move instinctively towards the realisation of their inherent potential” (Colledge, 2002:75). As we mature we develop a ‘self concept’ which reflects both our own valuing process, (based upon innate values), and also the valuing processes forced upon us by others (parental and authority figures):

“Subception is the mechanism by which individuals discriminate experiences that are at variance with the self-concept. Depending on the degree of threat in an experience, they may defend their self-concept by denying the experience or distorting its perception. Individuals are psychologically well to the extent that their self-concepts allow them to perceive all their significant sensory and visceral (emotional and intuitional) experiences” (Colledge, 2002: 76).

The self concept however can be at variance with the actualising tendency that strives to maintain, enhance and reproduce the ‘real organismic self’. Hence there is potential for inner turmoil. The actualising tendency strives to fulfil the real, innate self whilst the self-concept strives to organise experience so that we can see ourselves in ways that fulfils foreign and imposed values.

Both Rogers and Freud emphasise the innate resistance all of us have to perceiving external reality when it conflicts with previous valued beliefs, inner needs and drives. However, there is an important difference between how they view learning. For Freud, learning is a discipline. It involves pain and anxiety and as a result we have to be incentivised to learn otherwise we will simply shut the learning out.

For Rogers however, the deepest and strongest instinct that underlies all human behaviour is the ‘self-actualising tendency’ or ‘learning’. In Rogers’ view individuals are all striving to learn and what stops us is the imposition of foreign beliefs and values that inhibit our desire and ability to express ourselves.

Whilst Freud saw people as noble savages Rogers saw them as thwarted saints!

### *The OD Movement – Psychotherapy in the Workplace*

The Humanistic movement had a major influence over learning theory during the 1960's under the auspices of the OD movement. The link between what was primarily clinical practice and the world of work was made by Abraham Maslow a colleague of Rogers. Maslow too believed that people were driven by the need to self actualise or reach their full potential:

“Talent is also a drive, an innate need, an impulse to develop a skill or skills. ...He believed that personal failure consists solely of failing to live up to one's potential, and ‘in this sense every man can be a king and must therefore be treated like a king’ (Maslow, 1968, p. 99)” (Colledge, 2002: 131)

Maslow was followed by Herzberg, McGregor and a group of academics, researchers and practitioners known collectively as the Organisation Development movement. Beckhard states that the following assumptions are “universal”:

“Man is and should be more independent/autonomous  
Security needs should be met. Man should be striving to meet  
higher order needs for self-worth and for realizing his own potential  
The organization should so organize work that tasks are meaningful and  
stimulating, and thus provide intrinsic reward...” (Beckhard, 1969)

McGregor's influential theory X and Y (McGregor, 1960) proposed that if people are treated as learning, self actualising beings, they will become them. According to McGregor, if a manager assumes that the vast majority of people are committed, disciplined, responsible, creative, intelligent learners then they will be.

This combination of a basic belief in the goodness of human nature, the assumption that learning is a natural and fundamental human need and the construal of ‘psychological defences’ as being inimical to learning manifested itself in the ‘laboratory training’ methods popular during the 1960's.

Learning methods were aimed at stripping away people's defences in order to reveal the impact of one's behaviour on others, thereby generating greater tolerance,

acceptance and openness to experience. These methods were known variously as T-groups, sensitivity training, learning laboratories and encounter groups. They imported methods widely employed in the counselling and psycho-therapeutic world and applied them in the world of work. Their approaches however were controversial:

“It is clear that laboratory training often utilizes anxiety-provoking situations as stimulants for learning experience. Many observers (for example, House, 1967; Odiorne, 1963) feel that these experiences are disruptive to the health of some of the participants. Critics also feel that it is one matter to express true feelings in the psychological safety of the laboratory but quite another to face fellow participants back on the job. These views are buttressed by reports that some people return from these sessions liking themselves less and feeling unsure what to do about it.” (Goldstein, 1986:243)

This controversy gradually led to the decline in use of such methods. Perhaps the most influential criticisms involved the dubious benefits of such training for the organisation (Goldstein, 1986: 246). Once again training methods were faced with the sticky problem of ‘transfer’ back to the workplace.

### Argyris

Argyris was an early and strong proponent of the T-group methodology who went on to develop a theory of learning that influenced much current day thinking around management learning. According to Argyris, whilst we may hold a belief about how we *should* act, we often act in ways completely contrary to that belief and at the same time are entirely unaware that this is the case. This leads Argyris to posit the existence of two sets of theories. The first set of theories are deeply ingrained schema, learned in childhood through socialisation processes and probably sub-conscious. The theories or “master programs” that inform these responses are referred to by Argyris as theories-in-use. They are based on premises which are simply assumed to be true. For Argyris, these premises are often simply not true - they are simplifications and abstractions which require testing. Argyris claims that we rarely, if ever, test these premises. This is partly to do with their high level of abstraction and partly to do with the risk of losing control.



Espoused theories, on the other hand, are those theories that people talk or write about consciously i.e. “their beliefs, values and attitudes”. Under situations of threat or embarrassment people act in a way consistent with their theories in use, not their espoused theories.

Interestingly, there are such similarities within people’s behaviour under situations of threat that Argyris and Schon suggest that we all have the same prototype theory-in-use. This is termed ‘model one’ theory-in-use and is governed by four variables: 1) achieve the purpose as the actor defines it; 2) win, do not lose; 3) suppress negative feelings; 4) emphasize rationality. When we act in order to achieve any one of the four variables we are operating under a model one theory-in-use.

Learning that takes place within our Model I theory-in-use (i.e. does not challenge it) is denoted single loop learning. Single loop learning can be “important but ... not powerful”. Much learning that goes on within organisations is single loop, adaptive learning, involved in improving products, processes or systems. However, there are limits as to what can be achieved via single loop learning because we will not challenge the basis of the Model I framework within which it takes place.

Double loop learning, on the other hand, is learning that ‘breaks the frame’ of the (Model I) theory-in-use. A type of double loop learning is Model II learning. The fundamental values underlying Model II are those of the ‘true’ scientist: the generation of valid and useful information (including feelings); free and informed choice; internal commitment to the choice and constant monitoring of the implementation through feedback.

Argyris believes that we cannot execute Model II learning without help. This is because the values of Model I learning are ingrained and socialised into us from a very young age. If we act in a manner according to Model I, we are accepted within that society. If we try to act in accordance with Model II we risk censure and isolation.

### ***Self Development and The Learning Organisation***

With the increasing emphasis on change in the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there has been a search for ways of linking individual learning and organisational change. This has led to an interest in what has been termed ‘learning organisations’ (Burgoyne, Pedlar and Boydell, 1991; Garratt, 1987, 1990; Jones and Hendry, 1992, 1994; Senge, 1990). We can see the effect of the humanist movement on the learning organisation literature very clearly. Hayes, Wheelwright and Clark’s (1988) hallmarks or assumptions for creating a learning organisation make typical humanist assumptions. These state that ‘all employees are responsible, thinking adults who inherently want to do their best; creative talents and skills are widely distributed at all levels of an organisation and society; better performance occurs when artificial differences in how people are treated are removed; people make better decisions and implement them better when they work together’.

Humanists propose that learning organisations should be designed in order to facilitate individual self fulfilment through the process of problem solving and in so doing capture the fruits of the individual learning (Argyris, 1982; Beckhard, 1969; Senge, 1990; Pedlar, Burgoyne and Boydell, 1989). In this view the individual’s interests in self actualisation and the organisation’s interests in survival are fundamentally congruent. Coopey (1994) criticises these assumptions claiming that the humanist paradigm is fundamentally unitarist and hence serves the interests of those in power.

The humanist assumptions regarding the drive to self actualise and learn together with an interest in experiential learning (see below) and the learning organisation has led to an emphasis on self development as one of the key ways by which individual learning can be encouraged in organisations (Pedlar, Burgoyne and Boydell, 1989; Jones and Hendry, 1994; Senge, 1990; Garratt, 1990). This should be ‘self directed, experiential learning’ rather than “the academic or scientific approach to learning” (Jones and Hendry, 1994; Srivastva et al, 1995). The underlying assumption is that people learn best through experience rather than being taught by an ‘expert’. People are assumed to be sense-makers and this sense-making is assumed to be cumulative. Hence the more experience that takes place, the more learning and the more effective

the manager. The psychotherapeutic belief that the learner needs external help to overcome natural defences against learning has now entirely gone.

### *Critiques of Psycho-Dynamic and Humanist Accounts of Learning*

There are a number of problems with the psycho-dynamic and humanist accounts of learning. There is a tendency to 'pathologise' learning defences along the lines of: 'normal people learn naturally and unproblematically; others with difficult pasts and emotional problems defend themselves against learning and need professional help'. This professional help invariably comes in the form of clinically based techniques (T-groups, clinical counselling, Gestalt based interventions focusing on the 'here and now'). These techniques are, to say the least, controversial. Firstly because they lack face validity for many managers; secondly because, like the T-Group methodology, they can do tremendous harm, especially when led by unskilled facilitators; and thirdly because there is a lack of evidence that they produce the change that they claim to (Goldstein, 1986).

Another problem with psycho-dynamic approaches is that they can under-emphasise the role of analysis, thought, logic and rational sensemaking. Perls provides us with an extreme example of this. Naranjo (1993) who is highly sympathetic to Perls, nevertheless points out and decries his "anti-intellectual orientation, inherited by many" (1993:xxv). For many therapists the great 'sin' is 'rationalisation' and the purpose of learning and change is to come into contact with repressed emotions in the 'here and now' – not to 'understand' or provide reasons for one's behaviour. However, what is rationalisation for some might be 'sensemaking' to another. This primacy of the affective over the cognitive and the de-emphasis of sensemaking tends to skew some psycho-therapeutic approaches to learning and change. It is as if they see learning purely as a process of emotional development.

Humanist views of learning tend to see the drive to learn as fundamental to the human spirit. Its roots in the literature of psychoanalysis and psycho-therapy have tended to be lost and hence the emphasis on the role of defensiveness has diminished. This has

been relegated to a minor nuisance that can be managed through the creation of 'safe' learning environments. This ignores the extensive evidence that, even given optimal, supportive circumstances, adults can be quite ineffective learners (see the previous section).

Humanists have come under sustained attack by social constructionists and postmodern writers who claim that the focus on individual self-actualisation is simply a function of the individualistic, materialistic consumer-driven society of the west (Shotter, 1992; Gheradi 1998; Kvale, 1992). Indeed Kvale refers to Wallach and Wallach's term 'Psychology's Sanction for Selfishness' to describe the humanist obsession with the self (Kvale, 1992).

Another powerful criticism regarding humanist accounts of learning refers to their unitarist approaches to power (Coopey, 1994; Vince, 1996). Humanist accounts of learning assume that the interests of staff, managers and organisations are fundamentally in alignment. Managers need to learn how to create the spaces within which their people can grow and develop; self development and organisational learning are inextricably connected and investment in personal development invariably leads to a more efficient and effective organisation. These assumptions are challenged by those from critical approaches to learning. By the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, humanist accounts of learning were discredited as at best 'naïve' and at worst deliberate attempts to manipulate and control (Burgoyne, 1995; Coopey, 1994; Grey and French, 1996:9). Despite this however, they still exert considerable influence in the world of management development.

## ***2.5 Experiential Accounts of Learning – Learning as Living***

Experiential learning is most closely associated with the work of Revans and Kolb. Revans developed the method of 'action learning' which is still extensively used in management development. Kolb is best known for his learning style inventory and for his model of the learning cycle, although this has recently come under attack from a number of quarters (Holman, Pavlica & Thorpe, 1997; Nichol, 1997; Reynolds, 1997; Vince, 1998; Sadler-Smith, Allinson & Hayes, 2000). Experiential theorists

are the first to attempt to combine cognitive models of learning with insights from humanistic psychology and psycho-dynamic theories. We will briefly look at what Revans and Kolb have to say about how adults learn through experience.

### **Revans**

In 1947 Revans was director of education of the newly formed Coal Board. Action learning grew up as a practical response to a practical problem faced by the new organisation – how to facilitate the learning of miners and their managers in a way that would be relevant and would help overcome a culture of class antagonism. To start with, Revans began to use practical projects on his management training programmes. He soon noticed that it was in pursuing and implementing these projects that the learners learned in quite a different way. They became connected to their projects, had to use their own judgements and problem solving skills, they became passionate and argued their cases with the managers. This was in opposition to more classroom based learning where the ‘students’ simply sat, listened and took notes.

Furthermore, in the implementation of real-life, relevant and complex projects the trainee managers learned to interact with the miners and with the specialists in a more human, respectful and less arrogant way. They began to relate to people as people, dictated by their overwhelming need to address a complex problem.

These early roots of action learning help explain a number its characteristics:

it is not rooted in learning theory, but rather emerges from a series of observations around what appears to work in practice

it is underpinned by values around mutual respect for people regardless of their occupational role or status

action learning is driven by two distinct agendas – the resolution of real life problems that are complex and where the answer is not immediately obvious; the interpersonal and intrapersonal development of the individual who takes part in the action learning set.

it is inimical to the notion of ‘experts’; it is based on the fundamental premise that learning emerges through practice not through passively absorbing abstract knowledge.

Essentially, Revans believes that people learn through the process of solving complex problems in which they have a vested interest. How, then do participants learn in action learning sets? There are two levels of learning. The first level concerns the rational process of problem resolution. This is a five step learning process which is highly cognitive and rationalistic:

- i. researching the problem
- ii. hypothesis formation through insight and conjecture
- iii. hypothesis testing through experiments
- iv. evaluation of the test results
- v. conclusion.

Revans asserts that the “natures and sequence of the five stages...are invariant” (1982:638).

However, at the same time, the set consists of people all of whom are challenging each other to face biases, blindspots and prejudices. In doing so, learners develop themselves – not simply in the sense of acquiring new skills and theories but rather in the sense of re-thinking and re-working established patterns of thinking and acting. In doing this people are forced to go into their “Chamber of Horrors” (1982: 632) or confront their “personal hang-ups” (1982:636). Revans conceives of learning as a process of problem solving which also contributes to self awareness, change and growth because the learner is motivated to challenge all the emotional and intellectual ‘baggage’ that hinders the resolution of the problem. Learning is further facilitated and accelerated when conducted in groups as other group members may challenge the learner to confront blindspots in a way that would not occur in normal, on-the-job circumstances.

## Kolb

Kolb saw himself as providing a theory of experiential learning which would bring together an extant body of work ranging from the intellectual to the practical. In Kolb's eyes, experiential learning was already widely used and accepted amongst educationalists, researchers and practitioners. What was lacking was an explicit and holistic account that could provide a theoretical basis for what was already widely practised.

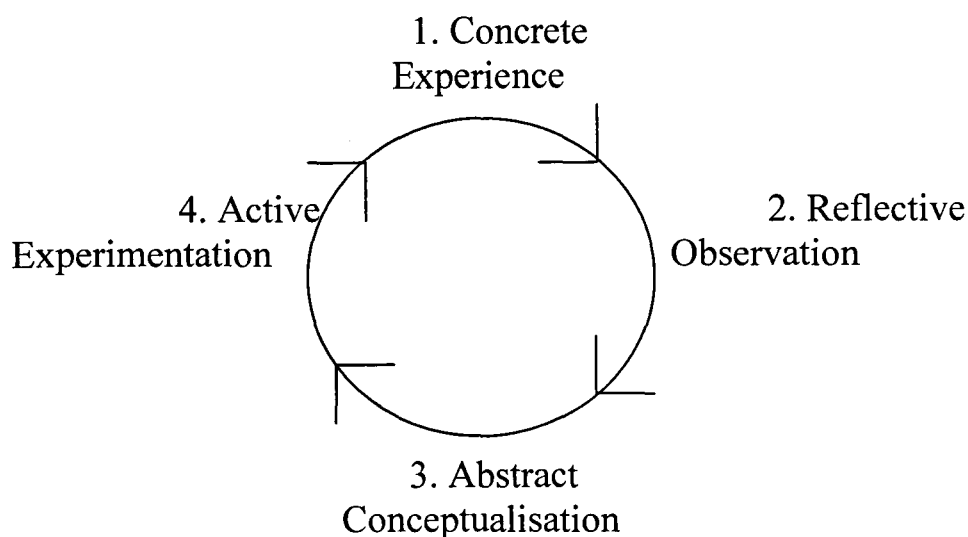
Kolb defines learning as follows:

“Learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience” (1984:38)

This definition makes some important assumptions: firstly, that learning is best conceived as a process, not in terms of outcomes; secondly that learning is a continuous process grounded in experience as the individual attempts to adapt to his or her world.

Kolb sees learning as the major process of human adaptation encompassing the more 'limited' adaptive processes such as creativity, problem solving, decision making, and attitude change. It is holistic in that it involves all the human processes, in all human contexts across the whole of the human life cycle.

Kolb is most famous for his learning cycle, which in fact does not do justice to the complexity and comprehensiveness of this thought:



What Kolb is suggesting is that we move through a process of problem apprehension, formulation and resolution very similar to that described by Revans. Firstly the learner experiences events in the real world of concrete experience. She then reflects upon that experience ‘internally’ as it were and transforms those reflections into ‘knowledge’ via the process of abstract conceptualisation. Finally, the knowledge is enacted in the external world via the process of active experimentation. Kolb also explored individual differences in terms of how we develop preferences for certain learning processes at the expense of others. Therefore one individual might prefer to immerse himself in concrete experience and avoid abstract conceptualisation. Another might prefer reflective observation to active experimentation. However, the learning cycle was only the start point for Kolb. His ideas concerning how learning contributed to maturation over the life cycle and the holistic development of the person have mostly been lost or ignored. Kolb maintains:

1. Learning takes place in four “development dimensions – affective complexity, perceptual complexity, symbolic complexity, and behavioural complexity.
2. Individual ‘complexity’ evolves in each of these four domains as, through each learning episode, we develop more sophisticated ‘knowledge’ structures.
3. As we grow and learn we go through three different development stages. The first stage is that of acquisition – from birth to adolescence. This is characterised by Piaget’s four stages of child development which culminate in the internalised structures that allow the child to gain a sense of self that is separate and distinct from the surrounding environment. The second stage is that of ‘specialisation’:

“One’s sense of self-worth is based on the rewards and recognition received for doing “work” well. The self in this stage is defined primarily in terms of content – things I can do, experiences I have had, goods and qualities I possess” (1984:143)

The final stage is that of integration. This is firmly based on the Jungian notion of individuation and the humanistic correlate of that - self-actualisation.



One is struck when reading Kolb by the richness of his theorising and how this has been impoverished by its reduction to the learning cycle over the years. However, although Kolb maintains that the learning cycle is manifest in four different learning domains – e.g. the perceptual, affective, symbolic and behavioural – he does not go into depth regarding the dynamics of the development on each level. In fact Kolb emphasises how learning is primarily a logical process that takes place slowly and invariably over time.

Kolb's emphasis on logic and the lack of attention to defences to learning have attracted extensive criticism (Holman, Pavlica & Thorpe, 1997; Nichol, 1997; Reynolds, 1997; Sadler-Smith, Allinson & Hayes, 2000; Miettinen, Jarvis, Boud et al. Vince, 1998). We will look at this in more detail.

### ***Critiques of Experiential Learning***

In fact, despite experiential learning theory being the main theory in use today (Kayes, 2002), both Kolb and Revans' theories have been strongly discredited in academic circles:

- i. groups impose norms of conformity and suppress expression of difference (Reynolds and Trehen, 2003)
- ii. it does not reveal the underlying dynamics of reflection giving us insight into when it might lead to learning and when it might not (Boud et al, 1983)
- iii. the model is not supported by empirical evidence and there are questions surrounding the reliability and validity of the questionnaire (Jarvis, 1987; Tennant, 1997; Sadler-Smith, Allinson & Hayes, 2000)
- iv. The sequential, staged model is too simplistic and does not reflect how people learn in chaotic, random, intuitive ways (Heron, 1992)
- v. it is not clear where goals, purposes, intentions, choice and decision-making fits into the learning cycle (Rogers, 1996)
- vi. it does not take account of when reflection leads to false conclusions or dogmatism; reflection can be lazy, ineffective or defensive (Miettinen, Vince, 1998; Nichol, 1997; Fineman, 1997)

- vii. it divorces people from the social, historical and cultural aspects of self, thinking and action (Beard and Wilson, 2002; Holman, Pavlica and Thorpe, 1997)
- viii. it denigrates the bodily and intuitive processes of learning (Fenwick, 2003)
- ix. it ignores the power relations inherent in the processes of learning, thinking and reflecting (Reynolds, 1999; Vince, 1998; Nichol, 1997)
- x. it ignores indirect experience as a source of learning, particularly the process of dialogue and discourse (Vince, 1998)
- xi. it ignores the influence of emotion on thought (Fineman, 1997)

This is a serious accumulation of critique, so much so that it seems surprising that experiential learning theory is still so influential. According to Kayes (2002), Vince (1996) and Reynolds (1998) experiential learning theory continues to dominate both theory and practice. In the view of Vince and Reynolds this dominance is entirely unjustified. Kayes, however, argues for the retention of experiential approaches to learning and attempts to address some of the criticisms. He adapts the theory to take into account a Lacanian perspective showing how psycho-dynamic needs that drive learning are shaped in the interaction between person and society. Even as he does this however, the elegance and pragmatic utilitarianism of experiential learning starts to disintegrate. We end up with a highly abstract argument that feels like a theory with incongruent components added on as an after thought. The future status of experiential learning theory is still highly uncertain.

## ***2.6 Social Accounts of Learning – Learning as Social Interaction***

Social accounts of learning have emerged in a variety of guises and forms. Bandura's was probably the first social account of learning that gained attention in the world of adult learning and training (Bandura, 1977; 1986). Through a series of structured observations of children Bandura points out how much learning is observational based on the copying of modelled behaviours. He proposed that this type of learning comprises a number of discrete steps:

### **1. Attention**

Attention has to be focused on the behaviours to be learned before any learning will take place.

### **2. Retention**

The learner then has to remember what s/he has attended to.

### **3. Reproduction**

This is where the learner transforms the images or descriptions into new behaviours.

### **4. Motivation**

Bandura maintains that the learner will not reproduce behaviours regardless of any internal desire to do so. The learner must be motivated to imitate. We can be motivated by the provision of reinforcement in the form of rewarding self-responses (treats, pleasures or simply a mental ‘pat on the back’, enhancing our self esteem).

Bandura used his theory to help patients with a range of psychological disorders. Patients would be ‘taught’ how to change their behaviour by observing a role model deal effectively with the source of the neurosis. The patient would then copy the behaviours observed in the role model.

The socialisation literature is often more concerned with organisational ‘teaching’ processes than individual ‘learning’ processes, (e.g. Feldman, 1976; Frese, 1982; Schein, 1968; Van Maanen, 1978; Van Maanen and Schein, 1979) but each author will have a more or less explicit theory of individual learning. Van Maanen describes his view of individual learning in the form of a “primary assumption” underlying his theory of socialization:

“people in a state of transition are more or less in an anxiety-producing situation. They are motivated to reduce this anxiety by learning the functional and social requirements of their new role as quickly as possible” (Van Maanen, 1978)

This idea of learning in order to reduce dissonance and anxiety is based on cognitive dissonance theory but is nevertheless similar to operant conditioning – learning to reduce the drive of fear. Once in this state, the individual is motivated to “build a set

of guidelines and interpretations to explain and make meaningful the myriad of activities observed as going on in the organization” (1978:21).

Socialisation situations appear to be highly conducive to personal change. In a new environment people need to develop new schemas, behaviours, attitudes and values in order to fulfil a goal - acceptance and respect by one’s future colleagues. Once in this receptive learning state the social environment facilitates, structures and shapes the learning via information processing, reinforcement and behavioural and attitudinal modelling strategies.

In the socialisation literature we see a shift from viewing social mechanisms of learning as more or less consciously ‘chosen’, surface behaviours towards viewing them as more formative, tacit and deep. Instead of individuals copying behaviours from a valued role model, we have individuals’ attitudes, norms and values being determined by subtle social reinforcement mechanisms.

The increasing emphasis on the social context as determining individual learning reaches its culmination in social constructionist accounts of learning whereby learning is seen as almost independent of individuals:

“If we do not assume that learning takes place in the minds of individuals, but rather in their social practices, then metaphors play a key role – as translation agents – in shaping social knowledge, communication, beliefs, identities, interactions and relationships.” Gherardi (2000)

“Learning is a process that takes place in a participation framework, not in an individual mind. This means, among other things, that it is mediated by the differences of perspective among the coparticipants. It is the community, or at least those participating in the learning context, who “learn” under this definition. Learning is, as it were, distributed among coparticipants, not a one-person act.” (Hanks, in Lave and Wenger, 1991:15)

Lave and Wenger’s (1991) ‘situated learning’ theory is influenced by ideas of apprenticeship and their background in ethnography. For Lave and Wenger, learning

is situated in a community of practice – a community of people joined through shared socio-cultural and economic practices and norms:

“learners inevitably participate in communities of practitioners and...the mastery of knowledge and skill require newcomers to move toward full participation in the sociocultural practices of a community. “Legitimate peripheral participation” provides a way to speak about the relations between newcomers and old-timers, and about activities, identities, artefacts, and communities of knowledge and practice. A person’s intentions to learn are engaged and the meaning of learning is configured through the process of becoming a full participant in a sociocultural practice.” (Lave and Wenger, 1991:29).

This definition is not dissimilar to definitions of socialisation and apprenticeship. Lave and Wenger are however keen to differentiate situated learning from these terms and other possible antecedents. For them, all learning is situated – whether one is an apprentice or a newcomer to an organisation or not. All learning is structured, formulated and made meaningful by the community of practice from which it emanates. This includes cognitive and abstract knowledge as well as skills, practices and role-linked behaviours.

This view eventually emerges as the ‘living is learning’ perspective:

“In our view, learning is not merely situated in practice – as if it were some independently reifiable process that just happened to be located somewhere; learning is an integral part of generative social practice in the lived-in world.” (1991:35)

For Lave and Wenger, learning is a social phenomenon and as a result the individual disappears in their work. In ‘Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation’, there is no reference to individual learning whatsoever. The nearest we come to a view on how the individual learns comes from a passage they quote describing how the Yucatec Midwives learn their trade:

“Girls in such families, without being identified as apprentice midwives, absorb the essence of midwifery practice as well as specific knowledge about many procedures, simply in the process of growing up.” (Lave and Wenger, quoting Jordan: 68).

Learning is absorbing. According to Lave and Wenger, we absorb values, beliefs and practices tacitly as part of our membership of a community. Learning entails “both absorbing and being absorbed in – the “culture of practice”.

How this absorption takes place is not specified. It is implied that vicarious and procedural learning are the main mechanisms through which learning takes place. In essence however, Lave and Wenger’s view of learning is ‘decentred’ – that is shifting from the notion of an individual learner to the idea of competent participation in a community of practice.

The problem of how these communities change, is briefly touched upon. Lave and Wenger devote no more than a page to their view that change emerges inevitably through the absorption of newcomers into the community and as such: “change is a fundamental property of communities of practice and their activities” (1991:117).

The movement from the individual learner to the community as the primary focus of attention and locus of learning, gathers apace in social constructionist views of learning. Holman, Pavlica and Thorpe (1997) give us a social constructionist alternative to Kolb’s learning cycle and in so doing provide an elegant account of learning from a social constructionist perspective.

Learning for social constructionists comprises the “construction, reconstruction and uncovering of meaning” (1997:142). This is done via ‘mediational means’ which are “devices through which a person experiences, senses and feels the world and also shapes action in the world” (1997: 140); an important mediational means, for example, is language. Learning then is a process which is:

1. achieved socially and interactively; at its extreme:  
“if internally reconstructed meaning is to be more than a belief, it must be validated socially. The individual, with others, must be persuaded that their

construction or reconstruction of meaning is a valid one...thus the construction of meaning must be considered to be both an internal and external activity, and not just an internal one, and as such internal reflection be no more privileged than external argumentation and persuasion”

2. socially and culturally defined and constrained:

“Experience....does not have a pre-symbolic quality; as mediational means are themselves socially and historically formed, the person is no longer the sole source or shaper of the experience. It is in this sense that meaning is ‘rented’.”

3. influenced by a ‘self’ that is itself socially and culturally defined:

“a person who experiences through mediational means cannot stand outside themselves and their history in order to obtain an account of pure experience or of a pure self.”

4. Conducted dialectically through argument and persuasion:

“Learning therefore can be viewed as a responsive, rhetorical and argumentative process that has its origins in relationships with others. As such, learning cannot be located entirely within the individual. Argument and debate with oneself (or selves) and in collaboration with others is the basis of learning”

In this account, individuals are conceived of as receptacles of socially validated meaning and discourses. According to Holman et al, the notion of a learning cycle with distinct stages of action, thinking and reflection “has imploded”. For them “experiencing, reflecting and thinking are not separate and opposite processes...but different aspects of the same rhetorical, argumentative and mediated process” (p.143). Learning is constructed in dialogue and debate with others. This dialogue (and its rules) has itself been shaped by prior participants all of whom have contributed towards its current format.

This means that for researchers of learning, our attention should shift from “the processing of information and the modifying of cognitive structure to the processes of participation and interaction that provide and sustain the proper context for learning” (Gheradi et al, 1998). It is in this context not only that learning takes place but identity is formed. For example, learners come to an activity already shaped by prior

social dialogues and they ‘rent’ those dialogues in order to pursue their own agendas. It is in the pursuit of their own goals that learners engage in social discourse and emerge from that discourse transformed, having been shaped by their participation in the social interaction.

\* \* \*

We have seen how, in social accounts of learning, the role of the individual has evolved. Bandura’s notion of social learning saw the individual as ‘choosing to imitate’ behaviours that are construed as attractive. For Bandura, learning took place in the mind and body of the individual. Van Maanen construes the individual as being particularly susceptible to learning what the community requires in certain situations such as job change, where dissonance is high and learning is the strategy the individual uses to reduce it. In situations such as these the individual is susceptible to influences from the community. Finally, for social constructionists, the individual disappears from the discourse altogether. S/he has become a tabula rasa, a tool by which a community attempts to ensure its ongoing survival and renewal. Learning has evolved from being a distinct process of observation, retention and imitation to being the unconscious absorption of ideas, codes, values, norm and rituals that is indistinguishable from living.

### ***Critiques of Social Learning Theory***

The views of those coming from a social learning perspective can be criticised from a number of perspectives. On the simplest of levels we do not understand when the group is a source of learning and change and when it is a source of stagnation and decline. At its more complex and philosophical levels social learning merges into social constructionism and postmodernism – particularly with the de-emphasis of the ‘self as learner’. However we will explore the implications of the role of the self in learning later in the section on postmodernism.

#### ***1. Groups Generate Conformity***

Firstly, the issue of groups being highly defensive environments where people compromise the ‘truth’ or their personal viewpoints for the trade off of ‘acceptance’,



‘belonging’ or conflict avoidance (Esser, 1998; Janis, 1972) is not mentioned. There is an almost *‘deification’* of the group in some writing (e.g. Lave and Wenger, 1991; Cook and Yanow, 1993). The group is seen as almost sacred, preserving ancient rites, rituals, norms, traditions, skills, behaviours and beliefs and passing these on painlessly to young yucatec Indians, flute makers, apprentice butchers and machine engineers. In this view learning is a marvellous, traditional, almost mystical process that involves the process of belonging in a community dedicated to the particular craft or knowledge or practice under study. The world seems benign, change is slow and adaptive, traditions are respected, people are happy and content to belong and learning is by ‘osmosis’ – perhaps the most wonderful and painless view of learning we have so far encountered. It is the group that learns, simply using the individual to embody its learning over time.

The group of ‘groupthink’ theory is nowhere to be found. The group of NASA in the case of the Challenger disaster is absent (Esser & Lindoerfer, 1989). This type of group dynamic and inhibition of learning is not even mentioned in social learning theory.

This is important. Many of the descriptions of communities of practice appear to be middle class idealizations of a lost pastoral idyll. Because there is no interest or emphasis on the self or on the subjective experience of the individual in these writings we fail to see the frustrations, repressions and inhibitions that often operate in strongly communitarian environments (Trager, 1984, for example describes this vividly from the perspective of a woman growing up in Japan). Reynolds and Trehen (2003), quote Giddens (1994) on the subject:

“Those who think of community only in a positive sense should remember the intrinsic limitations of such an order. Traditional communities can be, and normally have been, oppressive. Community in the form of mechanical solidarity crushes individual autonomy and exerts a compelling pressure to conformism” (Giddens, quoted in Reynolds and Trehen, 2003:173)

Here social constructionists are silent. We fail to see how and when social construction within communities leads to learning and when it does not. Rarely are references made to defensiveness, repression of dissent, conformity and compliance.

## **2. *Communities as Purveyors of Hegemony***

Secondly, from a more critical perspective, the group can be construed as the promulgator of vested interests, dominant hegemonies and hidden values. In this view, the group or community is the means by which people are lulled into false consciousness, passivity and compliance. The only learning that takes place protects the status quo; critical voices are silenced, alternative views and perspectives are side-lined. In this view, the group or community comprises competing sets of disparate interests where the stronger classes invariably control the means of learning and expression, subtly subordinating them to their own self interest. Again, the group of power, competing sectional interests, repression and control is under-emphasised in social constructionist accounts (for a variety of critical perspectives in this vein see French and Grey, 1996).

## **3. *Groups Construct Environments that are Intolerant of Difference***

Reynolds and Trehen (2003) show how group based learning methods (e.g. action learning, experiential learning in sets, group dynamics based training) actually inhibit learning, especially when it concerns experiences of ‘difference’:

“It can also be seen from these accounts how individual or groups seen as representing minority views or interests succumb to pressures to conform or are marginalized, the ways in which norms become established and sustained, and how differences can be transformed into hierarchies – providing the basis for exclusion”

They quote a number of participants on a course, describing their experiences of ‘learning’ in a group environment, for example:

“My frustration increased as I began to feel helpless. Helpless, because I was finding it difficult to come out with any suggestions I had. In as much as I wanted to, a part of me did not want to add to the confusion. I unconsciously

withdrew and I noticed that a few of the members were not saying as much as before.” (Reynolds and Trehen, 2003:173)

In their view, learning in groups is problematic and cannot be assumed by attending to simple declarations made within the group environment.

#### **4. *They Are Single-Paradigmatic - Sociological as Opposed to Psychological***

Social constructionists often fail to delineate the processes through which the individual and group meet, mutually influence and co-adapt. This is partly because writers are less interested in the psychological, subjective and individual *experience* of community than the sociological, objectified *expression* of community. By locating learning at the social level, the individual's experience, knowledge and learning is de-emphasised. Hence they describe what they see by virtue of a sociological paradigm (communities learning) and miss what they do not see due to the lack of a psychological paradigm (individuals defending against learning). But groups are comprised of individuals and even if the preferred level of analysis is the group, there at least needs to be a theory of the relationship and dynamics between individual and group learning. The question of how groups influence individual learning and how individual learning influences groups all within hierarchies of power and influence is under-emphasised in these writings.

### **2.7 *Critical Accounts of Learning – Learning as Emancipation***

Critical approaches to learning draw on a variety of intellectual traditions. According to Fournier and Grey (2000) these include:

“neo-Marxism (labour process theory, Frankfurt School of Critical Theory, Gramscian ‘hegemony theory’), post-structuralism, deconstructionism, literary criticism, feminism, psycho-analysis, cultural studies, environmentalism.” (2000: 16).

Critical approaches also incorporate postmodern approaches to management.

However, this incorporation is subject to fierce debate surrounding the ontological status of power relations (Fournier and Grey, 2000:20). In an attempt to clarify what

is meant by the term 'critical' Fournier and Gray identify three hallmarks of the critical approach. These comprise:

1. a non performative intent – questioning the values of effectiveness, efficiency, profit and competitiveness; problematising the goals of companies and organisations
2. denaturalization – questioning taken-for-granted assumptions; revealing what is hidden or not said within a dialogue that promotes or protects class interests.
3. reflexivity – being aware and explicit regarding one's ontological and epistemological assumptions; openly discussing and questioning issues surrounding epistemology and methodology.

Bearing in mind then that critical approaches to learning tend to overlap with postmodernist and social constructionist accounts what we say in this section will also have relevance for both the following and preceding sections.

\* \* \*

Critical theorists are divided on how to approach the discourse surrounding management in general and management learning in particular. On the one hand, management discourse is viewed as a socially-constructed legitimation of class interests passing itself off as an incontestable set of 'truths'. The role of the critical observer of this discourse is to stand back and reveal the tacit, hidden interests that are represented:

“critical management pedagogy puts ‘traditional notions of objectivity into question and is constantly alert to attempts to pass off sectional viewpoints as universal, natural, classless, timeless ones’ (Gibson, 1986:172)” (Perriton and Reynolds, 2004)

“*critical* work on management is, broadly, anti-managerial... The intention of such work is to make critiques of management practice” Grey and French, 1996:6)

The researcher or academic should be in the position of aloof, oppositional, anti-managerial observer. This will only work if the observer is not at all engaged with, or dependent upon the people or organisations who are the object of the critique. Hence, ‘critical’ can, and often does, become anti-management (Parker, 2004).

The less extreme approach regards management as a socially important and influential activity and therefore it must be “exposed to critical interrogation” (Grey and French, 1996:2). According to Willmott managers are:

“ human beings who have other and wider responsibilities as citizens as members of local communities etc. Their decisions do not just affect the performance of the company for which they work but can have major effects upon the quality and quantity of life enjoyed by virtually all members of society and increasingly, the planet.” (Willmott, 1994)

According to this agenda, the role of management education is ‘emancipatory’ – that is it is a call to ‘awaken’ the moral conscience of the manager and to free his perceptive structures from domination by technocratic, rationalist, performative assumptions.

It is easy to see how critical theorists focus not so much on ‘how managers learn’ but more upon ‘what they learn’. When engaged with management and desirous of facilitating their learning, critical approaches to learning stress:

- The need to awaken the manager to her moral, socially responsible role
- The formative influence of processes of power and ideology
- A perspective that is social rather than individual
- Achieving ‘emancipation’

(see for example, Perriton and Reynolds, 2004:65).

We have already explored the implications of the social as opposed to individual perspective and we will develop this further in the section on postmodernism. Hence we will focus more in this section on the notions of power, morality and

emancipation. What is important to note at this point is that the critical agenda has led to a concern with the development of a critical pedagogy as opposed to an interest in developing an underlying theory of learning. This critical pedagogy is concerned with how best to facilitate acceptance of the critical agenda and appears to comprise the following general characteristics:

### ***Deconstructing Dominant Discourses***

Critical theorists are concerned to ‘deconstruct’ discourses. This means revealing what is hidden, excluded and taken-for-granted in the dominant discourses of meaning.

In practice this entails:

- i. introducing feminist, ecologist, ‘third world’ and postmodernist discourses into the educational environment (eg. Garrick and Clegg, 2001; Holman, 2000)
- ii. developing in learners the skills to deconstruct dominant managerialist discourses, most of which are taken-for-granted as ‘truth’;
- iii. developing the skills of discourse in order to empower the discourses of the oppressed and marginalised.

Deconstruction involves ‘liberating’ students from the hegemony of the managerialist discourse.

### ***Challenging Modernist Discourses and Behaviour***

Perriton and Reynolds (2004) describe the pedagogical inheritance of critical management education. According to them, CME draws primarily on Freirean emancipatory approaches. Whilst this consists of a critical reflective approach as described above it also involves challenging people’s behaviour directly. This involves a more directive approach, ‘challenging’ behaviour that is “sexist, racist, authoritarian and manipulative” (Snell, 1986 quoted in Perriton and Reynolds 2004). Critical theorists assume that their challenges to managerial behaviour will in some way lead to changes in their behaviour. There is no overt recognition of the dynamic complexity involved in behaviour change. There is a tacit belief that people change

their behaviour as a result of reflection and being challenged (what Perriton and Reynolds refer to as ‘liberation’ and ‘castigation’).

### *Narrative, Novels and Drama in the Classroom*

Another approach involves the introduction of novels and drama into the classroom.

Thompson and McGivern (1996) outline how they use novels “to reflect the social and political processes of managerial life”. Their approach uses novels to reflect the complex, social, interpersonal and dialogical nature of management – “at a behavioural (micro) level, as opposed to a more organizational (macro) structural level” (Thompson and McGivern, 1996: 29).

Implicit in Thompson and McGivern’s use of the novel is a tacit theory of learning. This implies that access to new discourses leads to fundamental change in underlying schemas and values.

For example, there is a tacit assumption that reading a novel such as ‘The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists’ (Thompson and McGivern, 1996), an early 20th century novel exploring the inequalities inherent in capitalism, will enable the reader to ‘learn’ about the inequalities inherent in capitalism (changing their beliefs and behaviour?). Thompson and McGivern describe this learning process. Alluding to the main theme of “structural inequalities” of capitalism, they claim that:

“students have also identified other areas for discussion such as the patterns of relationships between the painters, and Owen’s commitment to change; Hunter’s control mechanisms have been paralleled with Foucault’s gaze; alongside this there have been discussions on the role of the pub in 1910 and the price of beer” (Thompson and McGivern, 1996: 29)

The suggestion is that the use of literature seems to work by enabling access to a new discourse which is subsequently practised and experimented with in classroom debate. These new discourses also open up new avenues for the interpretation of events that would otherwise not have been available. The authors see the role of novels in learning thus:

“we view exploration of narrative as providing opportunities not only to enrich imagination and creativity, but also as a mechanism to link experience, ‘rehearse’ different roles, reflect on the ambiguity and contradictory nature of relationships with a view to broadening their own (self-) understanding in preparation for the complexity of managerial life.” (Thompson and McGivern, 1996: 28)

### ***Problems with Critical Approaches***

The foregoing analysis has by no means done justice to the complexity or multi-faceted nature of the critical approach to learning. Part of the problem lies in the fact that current sociological approaches to learning are rarely just ‘critical’ or just ‘postmodern’. Most researchers in the field of learning draw on an array of overlapping influences including the critical, postmodern, Feminist and poststructuralist. French and Grey’s (1996) influential book, *Re-Thinking Management Education*, takes a critical perspective on management but includes classic postmodern authors such as Boje. Grey and French (1996) draw on postmodern influences in critiquing and re-defining the field of management education. Nevertheless, for reasons of time and manageability, we have restricted this discussion to the core assumptions underlying the critical approach.

Bearing all this in mind, there are a number of problems with the critical perspective on learning:

- i. the most important problem is its atheoretical and/or naïve understanding of adult learning. To assume that the process of reflection and challenge will lead to fundamental and enduring changes in belief, values and behaviour simply flies in the face of all that we know of individual and social psychology (see for example, Fiske and Taylor, 1991; Rokeach, 1968; 1973; Ajzen 1968). There is no underlying theory of how exactly critical reflection and deconstruction lead to changes in beliefs, values and behaviour.
- ii. As a result critical theorists have relied on Kolb, Revans and Schon to provide a theoretical basis for their pedagogy (Reynolds 1999, Vince, 1996). But we have already seen that these experiential, cognitive theories to learning have already been extensively criticised and discredited. Attempts to ‘rescue’ them



from this critique (e.g. Kayes, 2004; Vince, 1998) have not as yet exercised great influence and Kayes' attempt suffers from a lack of elegance inevitable perhaps when two or more major theories are 'bolted together'.

- iii. Critical theorists share the de-emphasis of emotion common to the cognitively biased experiential theories they draw upon. Vince is the exception to this and we will look at this later.
- iv. Critical theorists rely for validation of their pedagogy on feedback sheets (often pejoratively referred to as 'happiness sheets, Ibbotson and Newell, 1996) provided by students in their classes who rely on their teachers to provide them with a qualification. At best this could be seen as naïve and at worse a misuse of power. Because much of the 'learning' takes place in the classroom students may simply be learning 'how to rent a discourse in order to keep placate their teachers and pass their exams'.
- v. The problem of transference is particularly acute for the practising manager who ends up with a body of knowledge that leaves him or her feeling disempowered (Cunliffe, 2002; Brittan and Maynard quoted in Perriton and Reynolds, 2004). According to Kayes (2002): "ultimately the critical agenda lacks a developmental pedagogy that enables the individual to manage the increasingly complex demands that results once emancipation has been achieved"
- vi. Strangely for an emancipatory philosophy, critical theories of management de-emphasise action (Cunliffe, 2002). There is rarely any idea of what a manager can 'do' once she has been emancipated. According to Watson (1996) even technocratic, utilitarian managers are constrained from acting in ways that support their humanist values by senior managers who in some ways protect the exploitative, oppressive system that the humanist managers seek to ameliorate. This links to our next point that managers do not all belong to the same class; many senior managers could be said to comprise the ruling class and have more control over the means of production than many owners of capital (Fournier and Grey, 2000).
- viii. Because many critical theorists are 'anti-managerial' they lack an ability to communicate with the very people they aspire to persuade (Perriton and Reynolds, (2004). This leaves academics bemoaning the fact that managers

do not listen to them (Grey and Mitev, 1996) and blaming the ‘wrong’ attitudes of managers.

- ix. Because critical theorists make no reference to psychological theories of learning they can “offer no analysis of the continuing psychological and sociological appeal of ‘unreflective pragmatism’ and hucksterism to management education” (Willmott, 1994)

To be fair, there are some attempts to address some of these problems. Vince (1996) provides a compelling mix of critical theory with a psycho-dynamic approach to learning, combining the emphasis on critical reflection with a recognition of the emotional and defensive components of learning. He incorporates psychodynamic, social constructionist and critical theory to build a richer model of learning that takes account of some of the criticisms of Kolb we saw in the previous section (Vince, 1998). In particular, he stresses how learning is limited by the boundaries that we establish around ourselves “as a protection against anxiety and uncertainty, a protection against the unfamiliar” (Vince, 1996:113). These boundaries work on the individual, group and organizational levels.

On the individual level, Vince quotes Claxton in asserting that we all have strong urges to i. maintain control; ii. be emotionally comfortable; iii. maintain a sense of competence; and iv. be consistent (Vince, 1996: 113). As the process of learning is inherently one which undermines all these needs, we all develop strong tendencies to avoid and defend ourselves against learning preferring to enter into a state of ‘willing ignorance’. Learning will result only when the individual is prepared to handle the risk and discomfort that accompanies the learning process.

On the group level, whenever individuals meet together a ‘political’ system emerges which in turn affects the learning of both individuals and the group as a whole:

“People are positioned unequally in and by organizations and groups as a consequence of social constructions of their identity” (Vince, 1996: 124).

Vince claims that

“emotions promoting or discouraging learning are affected by the internal politics of a learning group... The political nature of experiential management education is expressed through the strategic choice available to group members to move in a direction that promotes learning, or a direction that discourages learning . In other words, movement towards either risk or denial/avoidance is often a political, as well as an emotional act on the part of the individual” (Vince, 1996: 125).

The political aspects of learning are particularly evident when applied on an organizational level. Vince describes a change programme that is implemented at Hyder plc. (Vince, 2002). Here the willingness of the individual participants to learn and change is inhibited by the strong emotions that are aroused and the vested interests that are threatened as soon as the change process gets under way:

“political activity may also mute people’s voices and distort their opinions, generating a defensive practice that reiterates differences and promotes scepticism about the point of dialogue. It is an understanding of the interplay between the politics and emotions involved in organizing that make it possible to identify how such different ‘feelings’ are being enacted and expressed within an organization... Whatever the individual or collective feelings expressed by organizational members it is likely that there will be both desire and ambivalence concerning organizational learning.”

Vince shows us that whilst experiential learning provides us with a starting point for how people learn, in practice it needs to be supplemented with understandings from critical and psychodynamic theory (Vince, 1998). He offers a powerful model of learning and the inhibition of learning but there is still more to explore in terms of how this is manifested every day whilst going about one’s work. For example, Vince is clear that anxiety can promote or inhibit learning and that learning can be facilitated by working through the emotional experiences of the learner. However, what is less clear is how these emotions are handled on the job and in particular how and in what circumstances people learn as opposed to defend themselves against learning. Moreover, Vince tends to underemphasise the processes of understanding.

sensemaking and action. In fact Vince sees learning as primarily an emotional and political process:

“The everyday activities of organizational members tend to be defined and justified rationally; therefore there would be little value, for example, in privileging emotion in the study of organizations if doing so means ignoring how rationality is used in organizations to *block* emotions (Domagalski, 1999). One aspect of the interplay between emotion and rationality concerns how rational processes apparently transform emotions to make them (seem) manageable” (Vince and Saleem, 2004, my italics).

Sometimes it appears as if ‘rationality’ for Vince is the equivalent of ‘rationalisation’ (a Freudian defence mechanism). Vince shares the Gestalt emphasis on the ‘here and now’ at the expense of the sensemaking aspects of learning – the ‘why?’, ‘how?’ ‘what does this mean?’.

Perriton and Reynolds (2004) raise some of these issues and in particular highlight the problems with CMS regarding:

- issues of power and politics in the classroom
- the relationship between teacher and student and the issues of identity entwined in this relationship
- the problem of engendered and culturally specific underlying assumptions
- the rationalist assumptions underlying the critical approach to management learning.

These issues are explored in depth and with a refreshing honesty regarding the challenges they pose to the critical agenda. In particular they acknowledge the problems around communication between critical educators and aspiring managers. The two communities clash in their goals, their values and their aspirations. How then can one set (the one with the power in the classroom) aspire to influence the other set without recourse to their superior position in the power hierarchy? They quote Pas:

“Suppose that you are a ‘younger’ student that aspires to become a manager...then suppose that you would be exposed to a teacher who has decided...that management students are in ‘need of emancipation’. Would it be possible for you to embrace critical theories, brought by a teacher who pities managers in general? Would you be able to accept this from a teacher (who) hypothesizes the aspirations and the construction of your future identity?” (Perriton and Reynolds, 2004: 68)

Perriton and Reynolds’ response to these issues is to develop an ideology of refusal. However, whilst this may address identity issues for *critical academics* it avoids the difficult issue of how *managers* might learn to develop a more critical and reflexive approach in the future. Hence, it has yet to be seen whether critical theory has anything of relevance to say to practising managers or whether, as suggested by French and Grey (1996), management education and management practice should become de-coupled. This would enable academics and their students to occupy a detached critical stance to management without having to offer ideas and processes to find solutions to the issues they raise.

Those critical theorists who still wish to engage with managers lack a coherent, viable and powerful theory of learning:

“Although there is some disagreement as to how management can/should be transformed, there is some shared emphasis on engaging in dialogue with management practitioners and mainstream theorists (Watson, 1994; Anthony, 1998). According to this line of argument, management is enmeshed in moral relations, decisions and activity, and managers should be morally educated. However, for some at least (e.g. Anthony, 1998), this moral education should suspend critique, or the preaching of emancipatory values, and start with a sympathetic understanding of management practice.” (Fournier and Grey, 2002: 23)

We are back to the same problem – how do managers learn to change their values? How on earth should managers be morally educated and upon what theory of learning should this pedagogy be founded? How do we get beyond the “preaching of

emancipatory values” especially when the objects of the preaching are those that would appear to ‘lose out’ from the adoption of these values? Interestingly, Fournier and Grey make no mention of Vince at all in their references.

## ***2.8 Postmodern Perspectives - Learning as Deconstruction***

Many management learning theorists identify themselves as both postmodern *and* critical (Boje, 1996; Brewis, 1996; Burgoyne, 1995; Chia and Morgan, 1996; Garrick and Clegg, 2001). In part this is because there is often a conflation between notions of ‘Critical’ (with a capital ‘C’) in the sense of Freire and the Frankfurt School, and ‘critical’ in the sense of being critical of the assumptions underlying managerialism and performativity - central to the tenets of the postmodern school.

Lyotard (1979), for example, speaking of language games writes:

“The decision makers....allocate our lives for the growth of power. In matters of social justice and of scientific truth alike, the legitimation of that power is based on its optimising the system’s performance - efficiency. The application of this criterion to all our games necessarily entails a certain level of terror, whether soft or hard: be operational (that is commensurable) or disappear” (Lyotard, 1979:xxiv)

Lyotard’s concern with the manipulation of language by an elite, his questioning of the underlying assumptions of performativity, his conviction that this power play is manifested through language games (“to speak is to fight” - 1979:10) and his concern to sensitise us to the occurrences, effects and contestability of these games is strongly reminiscent of the critical agenda. On the other hand, Lyotard is concerned to distance himself from ‘critical theory’ which he depicts as a dialectic response to modern or ‘traditional theory’. Traditional theory is a function of modern society’s need to legitimate its truth claims. Whilst critical theory may challenge these truth claims by reflecting on the underlying values they represent, it is in itself a product of the same language game.

Hence many postmodern writers in management adopt a ‘critical’ agenda (in terms of content) but embed this agenda within a postmodern ontology and epistemology. This can be somewhat confusing! Moreover it can and does lead to debates as to the ontological status of many ‘critical theorists’ truth claims (Edwards and Usher, 2000b:275).

Much then of what could be covered here has already been covered in the section on critical management theorists. In the previous section we looked at critical conceptions of learning as manifested in the changing of managerial beliefs and values. For these writers it was vital to ‘teach’ managers how managerialism represented an exertion of power by a self-interested elite intent on appropriating resources at the expense of the disempowered.

In this section, whilst many postmodern theorists would share that view, what perhaps distinguishes postmodernism is a concern with language and how it has been harnessed to perpetuate western cultural, political and social systems of domination and control. As we have covered the critical agenda in previous sections we shall focus on the postmodern concern with language as *the* mechanism in the construction of reality. Language is an exertion of power; it has rules of expression and mediation that are constituted in games that are themselves contested. Hence postmodernism is associated with a number of elements:

- i. an “incredulity towards metanarratives” (Lyotard, 1979: xxiii) and a movement towards local discourses
- ii. the indeterminism of meaning. Meaning, alongside language, is constantly shifting and can never be unproblematically transmitted from one person to another; meaning emerges out of the relationships between the transmitter of the message, the receiver and the broader linguistic context within which the message is embedded
- iii. ‘truth claims’ are no more than contested language games representing privileged access to legitimation structures
- iv. pluralism and the acceptance of alternative ways of knowing (inclusive of previously excluded voices, interests and knowledge forms, such as narrative and folk knowledge).

It is often, though not always, associated with an incredulity towards the self:

“For the postmodernist psychologist there is no unitary or free-standing self or self-consciousness. Rather, the self is constituted in relation to intersubjectively agreed meanings. As Lacan puts it: ‘Subjects are constituted by the signifiers of language rather than by psychological processes as scientific and humanistic psychology would have us believe’ (Lacan 1977)” Leicester (2000)

Harvey makes a similar point based upon Derrida’s conception of the role of language in constructing identity:

“If personal identity is forged through ‘a certain temporal unification of the past and future with the present before me,’ and if sentences move through the same trajectory, then an inability to unify past, present, and future in the sentence betokens a similar inability to ‘unify the past, present and future of our own biographical experience or psychic life’” (Harvey, 1990:53)

But how does this relate to theories of (management) learning?

Like critical theorists, postmodernists tend to address the topic of management learning by focusing on content. Hence they offer critiques of the over-arching, managerialist metanarrative that drives a lot of the managerial learning literature. They look at what is hidden at the same time as critiquing the rationalist, performative content of management development programmes. Again there is a shift away from process – an interest not so much on how adults learn so much as ‘what’ adults learn, and what perhaps they should be learning (Boje, 1996; Chia and Morgan, 1996). There is also a focus on techniques that contain implicit theories as to how adults learn. There is an interest in the use of narrative and philosophy as mechanisms for educating and developing managers (Boje, 1996; Chia and Morgan, 1996). Again, the theories of adult learning inherent in these writings are often implicit or at best sketchily drawn. We shall explore postmodern approaches to learning by focusing on the role of the self and the techniques used by postmodernists



in cultivating a postmodern sensibility. It should be noted however that much of what was covered in the previous section with regards the critical agenda is also relevant here.

### *1. Postmodern Critique of the Self*

Academics writing in the postmodern vein have taken seriously the onslaught of the self as proposed by Lacan, Foucault and Derrida:

“Postmodern ideas about ‘the self’ focus on the social production of identity, with selves subject to discourses of language, power, difference and plurality. The self is dynamic. This is where Foucault’s idea about the subject being shaped through the power of the disciplines helps to reveal a ‘history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects’” (Garrick and Clegg, 2001: 122)

For extreme postmodernists such as Boje the discourse is seen as a shaper of individual consciousness, an all-embracing, deterministic creator of the illusion of ‘selfhood’. For others, such as Kayes, (who draws on Lacan) the self is ‘constructed’. As ‘need’ and ‘ego’ emerge into the social world and they are shaped by the linguistic and cultural norms that enable their expression. It is this process of emergence and social expression that enable the construction of self.

This is important for learning and the implications are perhaps best seen in Garrick and Clegg’s point about the process of reflection in learning:

“This problematic view of an ‘essential self’ often provides the philosophical basis for the reflective practices commonly associated with project-based learning in the workplace. Reflective practices consist of those processes in which project-based learners seek to recapture, notice and re-evaluate their experience and to ‘work with’ experience to turn it into learning. Reflection is often understood as an assessment of how or why we have perceived, felt or acted (as distinct from how best to perform these functions). The problem here is that this represents a particular discourse – one in which learners

actively define their own experience by attaching meanings to events. It is precisely this ‘meaning-giving’ status accorded to the individual self that (philosophically) worries us.” (Garrick and Clegg, 2001: 132)

Learning for postmodernists does not lie in the individual re-evaluating experience and deriving new and personal meanings from reflection. This is partly because the ‘individual’ is bound within a discourse that both defines and limits those meanings. The sense-making function is ascribed to discourses, not individuals.

As Leicester (2000) points out:

“An anti-foundationalist account of the meaningfulness of our mental language cannot allow this paralinguistic ‘inner world’” (2000: 76)

In this view then, learning consists of exposure to new discourses – empowering the walking consciousness with a new set of meanings with which to make sense of her experience. For postmodernists such as Garrick and Clegg, learning consists of ‘dialogue’:

“this ‘curriculum’ can be developed by ‘discursive creators’ through promoting dialogue (and critique) about taken-for-granted assumptions related to work and development...As Rhodes (2000:230) puts it, dialogue needs to: ‘account for diversity rather than trying to resolve it or stamp it out with false consensus. As dialogue performs knowledge, it is through interaction and difference that knowledge continues to be created’. Dialogue and deconstruction have the potential to occupy an important space in workplace learning, if they are allowed to examine social, political and economic issues without always privileging one particular perspective (such as economic rationalism).” (2001: 131)

The precise mechanisms involved in a ‘non-self’ deconstructing dominant discourses, opening up the consciousness to new discourses and somehow exercising a choice or resolving tensions between those discourses are not outlined. As the ‘self’ is a myth, and the values, perceptions and preferences embodied in the myth are simply

creations of a discourse, it is assumed that exposure to a new discourse will replace those values, perceptions and preferences by some process of osmosis.

To be fair, not all postmodernists are this extreme. Indeed Lyotard ascribes the individual a 'choice making' function:

“A *self* does not amount to much, but no self is an island... one is always located at a post through which various kinds of messages pass. No one, not even the least privileged among us, is ever entirely powerless over the messages that traverse and position him at the post of sender, addressee, or referent. One's mobility in relation to these language game effects...is tolerable, at least within certain limits (and the limits are vague)... It may even be said that the system can and must encourage such movement to the extent that it combats its own entropy; the novelty of an unexpected “move”, with its correlative displacement of a partner or group of partners, can supply the system with that increased performativity it forever demands and consumes” (1979:15)

Here Lyotard allows for choice amongst the competing dialogues calling on our attention; he accords us power in relation to these discourses and indeed claims that the very existence of the 'system' depends upon a degree of novelty, creativity and unpredictability that can neither be anticipated nor quashed.

Unfortunately, Lyotard's emphasis on the generative power of individual creativity has not greatly impacted the postmodern management learning debate. Indeed it conflicts with the demotion of the role of reflection and the denial of the individual 'meaning creator'. Maybe Vince may help to reinstate the creative, choice-making self in this debate:

“My favourite definition of learning is that it is ‘the capacity to doubt those things that seem unquestionably true (Palmer, 1979)’ Vince (2004)

Doubt entails reflection and reinstates the individual's power to reject discourses and truth claims as well as to be formed by them. Nevertheless, the predominant ethos

within postmodern writing tends to stress language as formative of the self - the signifier is the focus of attention rather than the signified (Harvey, 1990:53; Morrison, 2000).

## 2. *Postmodernism's New Methods and the Role of Deconstruction*

The use of narrative, fiction, drama, metaphor and philosophy seems to have grown as important methods within management development. (Thompson and McGivern 1996; Cohen 1998; Morgan 1986; Chia and Morgan, 1996; Crossan et al, 1993; Palmer and Dunford, 1996; Buckler and Zien, 1996).

Chia and Morgan (1996) argue for the creation of Philosopher-Managers. According to them:

“Philosophy is not an academic subject. Instead, philosophising involves the cultivation of an attitude that attempts to ‘clarify those fundamental beliefs which finally determine the emphasis of attention that lies at the base of character’ (Whitehead, 1933: 125)...Philosophical thinking involved the careful ‘destructuring’ of systems of thought with a view to arriving at a satisfactory understanding of the abstracted nature of contemporary human existence...The philosopher-manager is, therefore, one who sees his/her task as continuously seeking to understand the abstract in terms of concrete experience” (59)

Hence it is through the process of studying philosophy that adult learners in general and managers in particular, recognise the truth claims of the postmodern discourse.

Others emphasize the power of narrative. Boje, for example, asserts how:

“Deconstructing management stories reveal discursive dynamics so that political hegemony is no longer hidden and taken for granted in bureaucratic practices” (Boje, 1996: 453)

In the construction of new stories other, different voices are heard:

“Listening to many voices is fundamental to learning. This means learning how to learn to manage dialogue in plurality and listening to a multiplicity of

assumptions...it means putting time into the discussion to assess and transform prevailing norms for organizational performance. It means confronting the basic values of capitalism” (Boje, 1996: 454)

So again, philosophy and story telling is a method for:

- revealing hidden power structures and repressed voices
- deconstructing modernist truth-claims and revealing the interests that these claims represent
- showing the fragility of all truth claims
- demonstrating the power of language to colonize the mind, construct the past and enact the future.

Whether rooted in philosophy or narrative, management learning appears to consist of a process of analysis. This analysis is focused on the deconstruction of language and power in the processes of discourse and meaning creation.

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Postmodernism’s critique of the metanarrative and critique of managerialism provides a powerful attack on traditional management education in terms of both content and process (how one teaches). The approach towards learning adopted by critical postmodernists such as Garrick and Clegg (2001), Chia and Morgan (1996), Cohen (1998) stresses, above everything else, the importance of ‘relativity’ and the impossibility of separating the knower from the known. If the world comprises a melee of overlapping, contradictory, confusing and conflicting discourses then it is incumbent on the learner to recognise them for what they are – agonistic truth claims projecting a melee of interests and power plays in the battle to occupy subjective space. The theory of learning underlying this appears to be firstly that by emotionally and intellectually engaging with the postmodern discourse one begins to see the constructed nature of ‘truth’ and secondly, this new way of seeing opens up new perspectives both on the self (which is further re/de/constructed through this process) and on the world around. In framing knowledge as a ‘discourse’ the dynamics of knowledge construction itself becomes a focus of study. The adult learner becomes

the adult ‘philosophiser’. Much of postmodernism’s focus is therefore on content and the process of ‘teaching’ – what should be laid before the learner, how should it be laid towards the learner. There seems to be less interest in delineating a postmodern approach to learning – that is assumed. Indeed, postmodernism has shifted the focus of attention completely. The right question is no longer, ‘how can we help adults learn more effectively’ but rather, ‘how can we help adults recognise the alternative discourses available to them and recognise the power relations embedded within discourses in general?’.

### ***Critiques of Postmodern Accounts of Learning***

And this brings us on to a critique of postmodern accounts of learning. Perhaps the most controversial assertion of the postmodernists is the disappearance of the self from learning. There is no notion of goals, values, emotions, beliefs, decisions, needs, love, personality, interests, status, self-esteem – or any of the paraphernalia that normally accompanies any discourse on what it is to be human. Indeed these notions are ascribed to a modernist mindset – scientific, materialistic and naïve in the association between language and a supposed objective reality. Let’s look at these critiques in turn.

#### ***1. An emphasis on the cognitive?***

The theories of learning contained in postmodernism are often tacit rather than explicit. However, they appear to be surprisingly cognitive. Bearing in mind that people connect with discourses in a number of ways (such as reading, listening, talking, narrative fiction, drama or philosophy) what is most often stressed in postmodern accounts is the growth in ‘understanding’:

“Dialogue and deconstruction have the potential to occupy an important space in workplace learning if they are allowed to examine social, political and economic issues without always privileging one particular perspective”  
(Garrick and Clegg, 2001: 131)”

“The purpose of university management education is not so much knowledge acquisition and accumulation as it is sensitising students to our own peculiar culturally based (and often idiosyncratic) ways of ordering the world. It is

about inculcating an intimate *understanding* of the way a configuration of relational abstractions (i.e. regimes of signification) which make up what we call management knowledge, is organized, produced and legitimised through interlocking acts of representational abstraction as to appear unified, coherent and plausible to a particular community of inquirers.” (Chia and Morgan, 1996: 58, my italics).

This does beg the question of how (or even if) this understanding is transplanted into the workplace. Now this is not a point regarding the transferability of the postmodern paradigm into a managerialist workplace; that would clearly be absurd. However, even within the postmodern paradigm there is an acceptance that ‘understanding’ is somehow ‘good’. What we do not know is how or why this understanding is ‘good’ and what effects this understanding has on subsequent action. In fact behaviour is a subject rarely mentioned in postmodern discourse.

For writers such as Boje, however, understanding is supplemented with a focus on emancipatory action, which consists of using discourse to fight the hegemony of the modern:

“In organizational learning, there is a need to teach the polyvocal and polysemous histories of exploitive technical efficiency and global colonialism. People trained in postmodern discourse work transform themselves into hierarchies prescribed by discourse” (Boje, 1996: 456)

“The learning organization can rebel by emancipating any oppressed group to be free agents: free from discursive coercion, knowledge coercion and normalization coercion using social science and engineering language and practice...third order resistance occurs...where multiple discourse compete for hegemonic dominance.” (Boje, 1996: 455)

Whether one agrees with Boje’s values or not (and I am sympathetic) the sheer enormity of changing western, capitalist managers into defenders of the weak and oppressed is breathtaking. This implies a complete transformation of their underlying values, sense of identity, goals, beliefs and behaviour. Moreover, this

transformation is to take place within a system of antagonistic values perpetrated by a global alliance of economic and political interests.

If any dialogue needs a theory of learning it appears to be the postmodern! The problem with the postmodern management educator's approach is that it construes what is probably a fundamental clash of power and economic interests as an issue of learning. This begs the question – would a privileged, utilitarian, self-interested, comfortable western manager *want* to learn a postmodern approach to management – especially based as it is upon a fundamental critique of capitalism.

## 2. *The “Absent Other”*<sup>1</sup>

Many writers on management development using a postmodern perspective are teaching on either undergraduate courses (Boje, 1996; Cohen, 1998; Mingers, 2000) or MBA courses (Kostera and Kozminski, 2001). In both cases the academics have the power of assessment that will have an effect on the nature of the dialogue that develops between teacher and student (Reynolds, 2000:75); in many cases, though not all, the academics are ‘teaching’ students with relatively little experience of management. What is missing from many postmodern accounts is the voice of the ‘stressed out’ manager, trying to survive in increasingly performative times’ (Garrick and Clegg, 2001). Students’ comments that are quoted in support of the writers’ methods may be either a product of the power relationship that exists between tutor and student or they may be a product of a pre-experience naivety on the part of the student. The big question is what do managers, trying to operate in the world of management think about postmodern approaches to learning? Here we find an astonishing silence – deconstructing the management learning texts we find the ‘absent other’ – the manager.

In part this is explained by the fact that much postmodernism is ‘anti-managerial’ and seeks to supplant the managerial consciousness (see Boje, 1996 for example). This however, cannot excuse the lack of ability to facilitate the change of consciousness in people that are crucial to the changes that postmodernism seek to purvey. This can lead to a type of postmodern lament:

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<sup>1</sup> Chia and Morgan, 1996: 40



“during a seminar organized by my institute.....I pleaded for an intensified dialogue, a chance to explain what we offer and what may differ from inherited expectations. One of the leading industry owners present said in an answer: ‘All I want is knowledge that is usable’ and he was applauded. I remained speechless. ‘But all knowledge is usable’ I wished to say if anybody was interested to listen, ‘horoscopes, the knowledge of magic properties of crystals. Use is not an attribute of knowledge, but of a user.’”  
(Czarniawska, 2003)

Czarniawska is astonished at the inability of industrialists to appreciate her philosophy of knowledge; she is not at all bothered by her own inability to appreciate their philosophy, which is dismissed as ‘modern’. Ironically, postmodern academics often believe in the truth of their worldview and are pejoratively dismissive of anyone who doesn’t, particularly modernist managers – hence their absence.

### **3. *The Individual is Dead, Long Live the Individual!***

Garrick and Clegg see the self as constituted by discourses, the meanings, beliefs and even subjective experience of the self being determined by the discourses that have entered consciousness.

Let us also look at how Garrick and Clegg employ the notion of the self in the same article:

“Personal values and beliefs about corporate work are ‘processed’ through self-regulation strategies that are required if one is to belong to the benefits and reward systems of the corporation” (124)

“The subjective and inter-subjective experience of ambiguity, doubt, confusion, and conflict can shift workplace problems, priorities and allegiances very rapidly” (124)

“Project-based learning inevitably involves the complex interaction of the self with the communication patterns of the workplace....Employees will often

learn to work *within* and *against* corporate plans for developing ‘knowledge workers’” (128 – their italics)

“Such policies do not necessarily foster or nurture individual development, critical beings, or a healthier ‘life-world’” (131).

There is a certain ambiguity in Garrick and Clegg’s notion of the self. On the one hand the self is divested of the role of ‘meaning giver’. The self is simply the passive recipient of localised dialogue and discourse. On the other hand the self is in need of ‘individual development’; it learns to work ‘against’ corporate priorities; it experiences ‘ambiguity’, ‘doubt’ ‘confusion and conflict’; it has values and beliefs that are consciously ‘regulated’ in order to achieve a specific goal – in other words it exercises choices based upon conflicting discourses, complex emotions, personal values and a variety of goals. This is according to the ‘discourse’ an extreme amount of existential power! The ‘discourse’ is not only reified, it has substituted for all the functions traditionally associated with the ‘self’. Discourses decide, choose, regulate, establish goals, generate emotions and instigate rebellion – they are the ‘meta-self’. Not only that, they have substituted for individual differences. Hence we are all regulated, emotional, rebellious, critical, developed as a result of discourses. How then, do individuals differ so much? Is this because we are all constituted by different discourses? If this is the case, it requires at the very least a new theory of individual psychology and learning – showing how a few discourses form an infinite variety of consciousness’s, behaviours, goals and emotions. Do we choose discourses or do discourses choose us?

What appears to be missing in much of this work is any theory of how the social and the personal interact on an ongoing basis in the workplace. Does learning stop once the dominant discourse has colonised the managerial mind? Does learning consist of the performative manager continuing to sustain that discourse in the face of alternative, competing discourses? Does learning consist of the assimilation and adaptation of oppositional discourses in order to disempower them? Does learning consist of the ongoing construction of identity in response to changes in dominant discourses? Is there a distinction between how managers learn in practice and how

postmodern writers would like them to learn? Whether learning consists of a deterministic process of identity construction or one allowing more individual discretion (as described by Lyotard) it is incumbent on postmodern writers to be more explicit about their theories of learning and of the processes that underlie and support them.

## ***2.9 The Research Question and A Definition of Learning***

The history of research into learning clearly mirrors the wider social and political environment from which it emerges. From the behaviourists' concern to establish psychology as a science, the cognitive psychologists' fascination with the computer, the humanists' concern with the self-actualising individual, the pragmatic focus on experience and performance coming to a head during the 80's and the critique of capitalist individualism and greed flowering in the postmodernism of the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century.

What is striking about all these theories however is that all, to a greater or lesser extent, have been subject to severe criticism from a number of different perspectives. There is no theory that attempts to embrace the holistic and complex emotional, cognitive and behavioural relationships involved in human learning and change. None of the extant theories explain why it is that sometimes we are capable of great learning and sometimes we resist, block and avoid learning. Perhaps Vince comes closest to this in his combination of critical, psycho-dynamic and organisation theory. However, recourse to the notion of defensiveness is not enough – why is it that sometimes we are defensive and sometimes we are not? How and why is anxiety sometimes channelled into learning and sometimes not?

***We are left at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, with no widely accepted theory of learning.***

Partly in response to the lack of robust theory, experiential learning theory appears to exercise a powerful influence over both practitioners and academics, despite its devastating critiques (Kayes: 2001; Reynolds: 1998; Vince: 1996). There is also a

tacit consensus that reflection leads to learning; indeed in many accounts, reflection has become synonymous with learning. This is a dangerous conflation of terminology. Reflection is a process that may or may not lead to learning as an outcome. Part of the problem with the literature is that there has been a tendency to separate learning as a process from learning as an outcome. The problem is that many of the processes germane to learning (such as reflection or emotion) are not exclusive to learning. Reflection and emotion are also characteristic of the processes of defence or bias or cognitive distortion. Processes such as reflection, discourse or observation may only be learning processes when they lead to learning outputs.

This is important. It implies that we can only identify learning processes when we can clearly connect them in some way to specific learning outputs. This in turn implies that it does not make sense to separate process from output. The separation of process from output has enabled process oriented theorists to focus on processes with no reference to whether they lead to learning or not. The content theorists on the other hand can focus on content with little conception as to the underlying learning processes that facilitate acceptance of this content. What we are trying to say here is that ‘change indexes learning’ and without an index of learning we do not know whether what we are studying is indeed learning or some other psychological process.

So the theories widely in currency today have serious limitations in terms of their abilities to identify, encapsulate, explain and even describe the uniqueness, complexity and illusiveness of adult learning.

It is precisely this problem that this research sets out to address. And we will start at the very core of the problem – how the individual learns. Because we still do not have a satisfactory theory of how the individual learns we are limited in what we can say about how groups, organizations and communities learn. Current discourses are left with insuperable difficulties in describing and explaining the dynamic, *interrelationship* between the group and the individual. If the self is formed by dominant discourses why, on gaining access to an alternative discourse, will one person update his current discourse whilst another person will not? Who or what exercises choice between discourses, and how is this done and why? By conflating group and individual learning the discourse is powerless to explain how individuals

(let alone managers) can ‘learn’ to overthrow the hegemony of the self-interested elite. The emphasis on ‘deconstruction’ is not enough; the onus on the postmodern academic is to show how deconstruction actually leads to changes in beliefs, values, attitudes and behaviours that are enacted in practice. If they cannot show this or fail to develop a methodology that does achieve this, then the philosophy is essentially powerless, limited to serving the interests of an academic elite. Unfortunately, postmodern learning theories rarely make reference to one of the most important constructs within learning – that of defensiveness. They de-psychologise the individual doing away with subjective states of mind but strangely ‘psychologise’ the ‘discourse’. Discourses decide, choose, regulate, establish goals, generate emotions and instigate rebellion.

Cunliffe (2002) puts this more elegantly:

“Such issues (emotions) are generally not covered in either conventional or critical-based management pedagogies, which bypass subjective feelings for more objective, structural, or ideological issues. Indeed critical approaches often dehumanize and disempower people by viewing them as occupants of discursive space, or products of systems of control. The implicit message is that it is not OK to recognize that we are living, acting, embodied beings because this is a false consciousness. Feelings tend to be suppressed under a façade of criticality rather than being brought out into the open: a view which elevates the conventional cognitive aspects of learning in which individuals are seen to think then act.” Cunliffe (2002)

By attributing a causal relationship to discourses postmodern accounts:

- fail to account for the infinite variety of human forms of expression, choice, preference, personality and behaviour
- fail to account for the fact that the individual ‘rents’ discourses for a temporary purpose – mouthing words in public which in private are not committed to
- fail to account for the role of hunches, intuitions, sudden insight or human creativity in learning

- fail to account for the infinite variety of discourses fighting for our attention which then give us the power to choose (Lyotard, 1979; Weick 1995).

For me, all learning begins with the individual. The individual may be strongly constrained by discourses representing a variety of economic, cultural, historical and political language systems and interests. But there is also a ‘Lyotardian’ self exercising choice – regulating, evaluating, editing, accepting and discarding the variety of ‘truth claims’ that bombard the consciousness. It is this dynamic, interconnected process of everyday construction and deconstruction that we need to understand. Moreover, this can easily be done within the context of a postmodern and critical 21<sup>st</sup> century sensibility. Once we understand the process of socially contextualised *individual* construction we can move on to explore the meta processes by which the individual, group and wider society interact, co-create and mutually constitute each other, even allowing for individual differences. But any group theory of learning must be rooted in a deep understanding and respect for individual learning. Indeed, without recourse to individual learning we have no understanding of the fundamental process underlying group learning. How do we truly understand the workings of hegemony without understanding the workings of the individual mind? How can we truly understand the fluctuating processes of dialogue unless we have insight into the individual mind and its evaluative, goal oriented, mutually constitutive relationship with discourse?

By focusing on the individual, we are not ignoring the group, the processes of dialogue or the expression of power relations. Indeed, I would hope that it is by focusing on what and how the individual learns we can open up these discourses and make them more complex and subtle, avoiding the necessity to de-emphasise the subjective, the emotional and the teleological self. Once we understand individual learning we can begin to explore how individuals learn either to express power or to construct a powerless identity; how individuals learn to influence and shape dialogue or are influenced and shaped by it. Hence the emphasis on the individual is an attempt to open up dialogue rather than close it down – to develop a common language so that the varying traditions can communicate and tolerate their differences (that is if they want to!).

Hence my question will centre on how the individual learns. The question this research will attempt to answer is:

*‘given the competing assumptions and unanswered questions regarding learning, how do managers and staff learn when their organisations go through change?’*

In short, this thesis is attempting to lay the foundations for a new theory of individual learning – one that takes into account the insights and perspectives available to us in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

In order to address this question, and in light of the review of the literature, how I define learning will vitally shape the quality and outcome of this research. After a century of research into learning if there is one thing that we have learned is that learning cannot be compartmentalised. Learning outcomes comprise changes in behaviour, beliefs and/or emotional orientation towards a cue. These changes do not necessarily occur simultaneously; furthermore they may not *all* occur within each learning event. But any research into learning must account for them all. As a result I have defined ‘learning’ (as outcome) as follows -

Learning takes place when the individual manifests:

- i. new or changed constructs, schemas and/or paradigms (including self concept)
- ii. new or changed emotional orientations (including self esteem)
- iii. new or changed behaviours.

This research will attempt to identify what learning processes tend to generate the learning outcomes listed above in the context of organisational change. Hence this research will be focusing on both processes and outcomes: what learning processes seem to facilitate changes in behaviour, beliefs and emotional orientations. If we want to facilitate change (whether this be in terms of increasing adaptability and flexibility or facilitating recognition of the hidden structures of power and control) it would help to understand the learning processes that lead to human change. This is what the research seeks to address.

## **Chapter 3. Ontology and Epistemology**

### ***3.1 Three Epistemologies and Learning Research***

As Deetz (1996) claims there is no one right way to map the epistemological territory. Attempts that have been made range from the metaparadigms of Burrell and Morgan (1979) and Deetz (1996) to simple lists (Bem and Looren de Jong 1997; Blaikie 1993; Johnson and Duberley, 2000; Layder 1994). I will take three overarching ‘paradigms’ or ‘discourses’ and show how each has influenced how learning has been both construed and investigated. This chapter has been divided into three sections:

1. positivism and its influence on learning theory and practice
2. interpretivism/constructionism and its influence on learning theory and practice
3. critical theory and post-modernism – their influence on learning theory and practice.

These categories are somewhat blunt and others would construe the field differently but these are the typologies that seem to have most bearing on and relevance for work in management learning. I have no doubt that there will be many approaches “lost in some hole in paradigmatic space” (Deetz, 1996) but my account is not intended to be comprehensive; rather I simply wish to illuminate how fundamental ontological and epistemological differences have influenced and will influence research into learning.

#### **3.1. i Positivist/Realist Approaches**

Positivists assume that there is a real, objective reality that can be captured as human knowledge. Bem and Looren de Jong (1997) sum up the positivist position as follows:

- The basic elements of scientific knowledge are sense data and the observation statements reflecting them; the senses give us direct access to the facts of the world.



- Theoretical terms and expressions are only to be admitted in theories if they can be deduced from carefully controlled observations;...
- Science has a deductive-nomological structure...the different sciences use the same method and can, therefore, be unified...
- In the assessment of scientific products, like hypotheses and theories, it is only the 'context of justification' that counts, that is, strictly logical, methodological and sound epistemological criteria"

This belief in the existence of a world 'out there', real, objective and ultimately accessible (if only partly) to human reason has profoundly influenced research into learning.

As we have seen in the previous chapter the earliest studies into learning were conducted by positivists, concerned to 'prove' that psychology was in fact a science on a par with the natural sciences. This desire, together with the dominant positivistic hegemony at the turn of the century, led researchers to 'frame' learning in terms of scientific laws, with dependent and independent variables, observable data (changed behaviour being the only allowable manifestation of learning) using an experimental, laboratory-based methodology.

The use of dependent and independent variables, the concern with laws, notions of reliability and validity dominate much learning research, especially that emerging from American (as opposed to European) and 'strong' AI schools (Bem and Looren de Jong, 1997:108; Colquitt and Simmering, 1998; Fahey and Narayanan, 1989; Goodwin and Ziegler, 1998; Gruenfeld et al, 2000; Reger and Palmer, 1996; Reber, 1993).

Even schema research often has a positivist epistemology. According to a positivist perspective, if managerial knowledge could be 'mapped' in terms of underlying schemas, causal associations, categorisations etc and then compared in some way to the 'real' external environment, managerial decision making could be made more 'rational' (e.g. Reger and Palmer, 1996). Furthermore, cognitive psychologists have tended to 'reify' the schema notion. This has led to researchers attempting to 'map'

schemas, in many cases based upon the underlying assumption that these maps are literal depictions of knowledge structures lying somewhere in the brain:

“On the one hand, the idea of ‘mental maps’ in different forms permeates many discussions of cognition. The status of these images is the subject, however, of considerable debate. One line of thinking closely equates the nature of the world, human representation of the world and the researcher’s graphic depiction or model of cognitive activity....There are cognitive scientists who have a great deal of difficulty with this position....My belief is that mental maps can also be more than a methodological tool: we can hope to capture something that has the same essential characteristics as thought itself. In this view, the mental map is the knowledge that subjects use themselves. Even if current maps fall short of this ideal, we are closer with cognitive mapping to understanding intentional choice than we have been before” (Huff, 1990:14)

Learning in this paradigm, is simply the acquisition of new insights into reality and the adjustment of the underlying map to incorporate them.

This approach has strongly influenced researchers in the field of management learning. In this view learning is akin to the processing of information that exists ‘out there’ in the external environment. As the environment changes managers have to adjust their mental maps accordingly. If this is not done then decisions, (assumed to be based upon these cognitive structures) will be sub-optimal. However, there are a number of factors that militate against this adjustment including the flawed nature of our information processing capacities and the complexity and ambiguity of the external informational environment.

Reber’s highly positivist work has been enormously influential in legitimising the notion of ‘implicit learning’. For example, he conducted laboratory studies where apparently random streams of numbers were shown to subjects in an experimental setting. The numbers rapidly scrolled past and subjects could have no means of reflecting on or analysing the data. The apparently random numbers nevertheless contained ordered sequences and Reber found that subjects were able to predict the

next numbers in the sequence without being consciously aware of how they were able to do this (Reber, 1993). Reber's unwavering commitment to the positivist method has helped to propel the idea of implicit knowledge and unconscious learning into mainstream learning theory. Anderson, another 'realist' from the AI school (Hill, 1997:122) also popularised the notion of 'procedural learning' (conscious) vs. 'declarative learning' (mostly unconscious). The interest in unconscious knowledge was also given impetus by the work on expert systems and the attempts to capture 'what experts know' for the purposes of computer programming (Thagard 1998: 13). From this perspective 'knowledge' is assumed to be a literal depiction of reality for the purposes of prediction and control.

In clinical psychology, realism is associated with the belief that there are more or less functional representations of 'reality out there' and it is the psychologist's job to help patients develop more realistic (and hence more functional) ways of construing the world (Morrison, 2000; Edwards and Usher, 2001; Walker, 2001). The psychologist has to help the patient 'correct' his or her model and it is assumed that the psychologist's perspective is more rooted in reality than that of the patient. More subtly perhaps psychologists with a realist perspective, assume that psychological constructs such as goals, motivations, emotions, values and self concept actually apply to underlying psychological processes: i.e. they are not simply aspects of language (a way of talking about 'how we are' in the world) but are real phenomena that make a difference to how we think, feel and behave.

Experiential learning, whilst focused upon the active construction of experience by the learner, nevertheless can be based upon a realist ontology. Kolb's theory, for example, is a metanarrative of lifelong learning, covering how humans learn throughout the life cycle. The famed learning cycle is presented as an invariant description of adult learning supported by a psychometric instrument designed to 'measure' individual learning preferences and styles.

Whilst positivism has helped to define the field of learning (and psychology in general) there are important limitations in adopting a purely positivist approach to learning.

Firstly, extreme positivists in fields such as artificial intelligence, expert systems and behaviourism find it difficult to deal with subjectivity. Bem and Looren de Jong (1997) describe the dilemma of some positivists well:

“Behaviourists, identity theorists, eliminativists, computationalists, because of an almost neurotic fear of subjectivity, try to ignore or deny subjective states.”  
(1997:133)

In terms of learning this leads to reductionism. Learning is reduced either to information processing, stimulus response mechanisms or the vicarious copying of behaviours. Adults may indeed process information; they may learn automatic behaviours in the presence of a fear conditioned stimulus (looking down when the boss comes in, for example); they may observe and copy behaviours in role models they admire but this is not the whole story. Because many positivists do not investigate or understand how people subjectively construe situations they will find it difficult to understand how, when and why people do adopt these strategies and how, when and why they do not. For example, when do managers up-date their maps of a changing world and when do they not? We are left with explanations rooted in the environment (e.g. informational complexity and surfeit) or with individual differences (e.g. cognitive style, ‘motivational profiles’) or a simple denial of the problem, where individual differences in information processing are simply not discussed.

Secondly, a large proportion of positivists do not deal with notions of intentionality, emotion, values or sense-making either because they ‘cannot’ or because they ‘will not’ or because, as in the case of Churchland (1986), they deny their ontological status – they belong to mere folk psychology.

Thirdly, there is also a tendency amongst positivists to assume there is a ‘right’ or ‘optimal’ learning output which the learner has to match. This may be in the form of a behaviour (competence) or in the form of a more complex, intricate and representational schema of reality. So in this paradigm, whilst the subjective may even be acknowledged via the use of schemas, for example, it is seen as a source of potential bias, error or lack of competency. The subjective is where the rational

information processing and behavioural adaptation processes break down; the subjective is the source of error in the mechanism.

Perhaps the final criticism of positivist approaches to learning is that by eliminating the subjective element they find it difficult to understand learning in real life settings – a criteria that positivists value. This limits its applicability in those settings where organisational rationality tends to come under stress, particularly senior management decision-making (Kets de Vries 1994). This of course leads to the greatest vacuum in many positivist approaches to learning – the absence of emotion (Fineman 1997; 2003; Vince 1998).

### **3.1.ii. Interpretive Approaches**

Bauman (quoted in Blaikie, 1993: 35) has identified two differing tendencies within interpretive approaches which he termed ‘legislative’ and ‘interpretive’ reason. ‘Legislative reason’ is used to describe phenomenology with an underlying realist ontology and has its roots in Schleiermacher (1768 – 1834), Husserl (1859 – 1938) and Dilthey (1833 – 1911). All three believed in an objective reality that, whilst mediated by language, could be accessed by either the disciplined researcher standing outside history (e.g. Husserl) or by successive researchers over time building up increasingly accurate representations of the ‘truth’ (e.g. Dilthey).

Strauss and Corbin (1998) are examples of the legislative tradition. In the preface to their book ‘Basics of Qualitative Research’ Strauss and Corbin (1998) aim to provide answers to the following questions:

“How can I have a theoretical interpretation whilst still grounding it in the empirical reality reflected by my materials? How can I make sure that my data and interpretations are valid and reliable? How do I break through the inevitable biases, prejudices, and stereotypical perspectives that I bring with me to the analytic situation? How do I pull all of my analysis together to create a concise theoretical formulation of the area under study?”

Hence whilst grounded theory places the meanings of the social actors at the centre of the research, it does so in order to build valid theories that in some way reflect empirical reality:

“hopefully research moves us increasingly toward a greater understanding of how the world works” (1998: 4).

According to Strauss and Corbin then, interpretive approaches are means by which we can gain a closer insight into ‘reality’ or ‘the way the world works’. This can be done precisely because this reality is constituted in the meanings, goals, emotions, values, beliefs etc of the social actors being investigated; if we can understand these subjective states we can understand the deepest structures underlying social life.

‘Interpretive reason’ is phenomenology that has a subjectivist ontology – a belief that reality is ‘constructed’ by social actors in time and space and that it is not possible to access this reality as an aloof and separate entity. The researcher will always be bound by the epoch and culture within which she finds herself and her role is to reveal not ‘truth’ but possibilities and meanings:

“Social constructionism views discourse about the world not as a reflection or map of the world but as an artefact of communal exchange” (Gergen, 1985)

This fundamental difference continues to manifest itself in current day interpretive approaches. Guba and Lincoln (1989) summarise this view:

“Constructions are, quite literally, created realities. They do not exist outside of the persons who create them: they are not part of some “objective” world that exists apart from their constructors”

The implications of this epistemological orientation for researchers of learning are profound. Social constructionism has not only generated explicitly social constructionist approaches to learning (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Gheradi, 2000) but they have also influenced postmodern, humanist and psycho-therapeutic approaches.

We have already explored these approaches in detail. Here we will look at the methodological implications of conducting a social constructionist approach.

### **1. *The Role of the Researcher***

Social construction *is* learning. The process of making sense out of one's experience, constructing models of the world that help us understand and act is simply another way of construing the process of learning. Many social constructionists do not have much to say about learning because it is so fundamentally taken-for-granted; it is the tacit assumption upon which all other beliefs and practices rest. So for interpretivists the only learning that is problematic is the learning of the 'external' researcher. For social actors learning is accomplished every minute and every day through the simple process of living, however as soon as an 'observer' comes along and attempts to understand, document, research those social actors then he has the problem of accessing the meanings of people and cultures through the distortion of his own constructions. Learning then only becomes an issue when we try to codify the learning of others in the pursuit of 'knowledge'. The role of the researcher is to "render experience intelligible" and "give meaning to such experience" (Gergen, 1980 quoted in Bem and Looren de Jong, 1997). The researcher is seen as a 'co-participant' whose job it is to attempt to see the world through the eyes of her co-enquirers; to work reflexively, constantly refining and testing her insights and intuitions against the insights and 'knowledge' of her co-enquirers; to develop shared meanings with her co-enquirers; to open up new perspectives, possibilities, insights and meaning for both herself and for them; to be as open as possible about her own role in the research process, recording her prior assumptions and the values driving the research; to achieve a pragmatic, empowering learning outcome for the participants involved (e.g. Reason and Rowan, 1981).

### **2. *Learning as Sense-making***

The focus on behaviour change in learning shifts towards a focus on sense-making. Sensemaking as learning is not simply the process of imposing meaning upon events or stimuli; it is the creative, socially constructed process of devising new meanings that are generative of enduring personal and collective change. Furthermore, there is no sense within social constructionist accounts that any one meaning is more or less effective than another. Hence the researcher cannot stand outside the meaning

construction and evaluate the effectiveness of another person's attempt to make sense of reality.

### **3. *The Focus on the Social***

For social constructionists the emphasis shifts from the individual to the group; reality lies only in the extant socially validated discourses. What we see in accounts by Lave and Wenger (1991) and Gheradi (2000) is a shift of emphasis from the self to the social; learning cannot be just "a belief", it has to be validated by a social cohort. Hence the study of learning has to be grounded in the study of group processes. Hence, for social constructionists, the individual is said to have learned if they have contributed to the construction of meaning within a community, regardless of what this may have done to the individual's internal belief system (i.e. silenced a tentative, slowly emerging belief in one's own insights). An individual sitting alone and construing personal meaning is not encompassed within the social constructionist definition of learning. There appears to be no role in learning for the 'private' self using language to challenge the boundaries of his culturally determined beliefs and values.

### **4. *The Problem of Defensiveness***

The problem with defensiveness lies in the fact that the facilitator either has to 'diagnose' that the learner is being defensive (and hence his learning is deficient in some way) or she has to allow the learner to construe his world as he wishes, not really challenging this construal. If she decides that the learner is being defensive, this implies that she has an idea of how his learning could be more effective (and hence how his current learning is less effective). This of course implies that one person's construal can be more effective than another's; it implies some notion of objective reality and how someone might not be taking account of that objective reality in an effective way. However, if one remains true to the social constructionist position the facilitator should never 'diagnose' and should rather be spending her energy on challenging her own construals in favour of the learner's. She should be attempting to see the world through the eyes of the learner in a non-critical manner regardless of whether those views are sub-optimal, defensive and self-serving (see Walker, 2001, for an example of this view).



## 5. *Groups and the Distortion of Meaning*

We saw in the last chapter how social constructionists seem to revere the group without referring to the problematic role that group dynamics play in the construction of meaning (groupthink, social loafing etc). There is little acknowledgement of the substantial body of research and its implications for the construction of meaning, the dynamics of change and the exercise of power in groups (Esser, 1998; Sutherland, 1992). Moreover, the postmodernist idea of the group as oppressor – suppressing thought through the control of language tends to be ignored in social constructionist accounts.

This has important ramifications for research design. If we cannot locate learning within the mind of the individual, we are left with studying the group. But are we capturing group learning or group repression of learning? How can we tell – especially as external researchers it is not our job to ‘evaluate’, judge or analyse?

In reviewing social constructionist approaches to learning I found them useful in making me face my own biases and forcing me to examine how those biases have affected my approach to learning. The emphasis on the individual constructing his or her own learning is a vital counterpoint to positivist reductionism; but in some respects social constructionists can be deterministic, dehumanising and intolerant, ignoring fundamental and vitally important issues in learning such as the role of the self, individual differences, the interplay between self, group and society and the role of power, politics and change.

Perhaps most importantly, for me, was the de-emphasis of the self, the deification of the group and the assertion that all meaning-creation is equally effective. As I start my research with an interest in the private, personal and intricate sense-making dynamics of the individual, a belief that group processes often suppress individual creativity and vitality and a strong belief that denial and distortion is far more prevalent than is widely acknowledged, I find myself excluded from a radical, interpretive (not legislative) social constructionist paradigm.

### 3..iii Postmodern and Deconstructionist Approaches

As we have seen postmodernism comprises a number of beliefs that challenge the very nature of truth and theory. Postmodernism:

- ***Rejects the Modern Meta-Narrative***

The meta-narrative is an invasion of intellectual space – in asserting the truth of its own claims it excludes competing accounts from being considered.

- ***Focuses on the Centrality of Language and Relativism***

For post-modernists such as Derrida or Lyotard meaning begins and ends with language. Hence, knowledge is reduced to competing discourses each with its own peculiar ‘language games’, embedded meanings and structures of legitimacy. We can never ‘know’ the signified; we are locked into a world of self-referential signifiers. There is no distinction between the knower and the known.

- ***The Disappearance of Self***

The ‘knower’ or ‘self’ is simply a construction of the system of signifiers which comprises it. Psychological processes such as motivation, emotion, goals and desire do not exist outside the language that comprises them.

- ***Rejects Closure***

The relativity of truth claims transforms the process of knowledge definition. Knowledge definition becomes a battle for supremacy, determined partly by access to linguistic and cultural sources of power.

- ***Highlights Deconstruction and Problematises Legitimacy***

Deconstruction is where post-modernism and critical theory meet. It is only by ‘deconstructing’ the text that we can reveal the meanings and discourses that are excluded from the writer’s representation of reality.

\* \* \*

There are a number of methodological implications of adopting a postmodern approach to learning. Shotter (1992) outlines what a “Meta-Methodology of a Postmodern Science of Mental Life” might look like. Here we see a fundamental shift in values, attitudes and aims and in types of investigative procedure, in attitudes to language and in modes of legitimation. In particular this involves a shift:

1. “from a concern with *theories to practices*, from theorizing to the provision of practical, instructive *accounts*”
2. “from an interest in *things* to an interest in *activities* and the *uses* to which we can put the ‘mental tools’ or ‘psychological instruments’ (Shotter, 1989; Vygotsky, 1962) of our own devising”
3. “a shift away from what goes on in the heads of individuals to an interest in the (largely social) nature of their surroundings, and what these can (or will) ‘allow’, ‘permit’ or ‘afford’”
4. “a shift from procedures conducted on one’s own, to their negotiation with others”
5. “from starting points in reflection .... to local starting points embedded in the historical flow of social activity in daily life”
6. “from language being primarily for the representation of reality, to it being primarily for the coordination of diverse social action, with its representational function working *from within* a set of linguistically constituted social relations”
7. “from a reliance upon our experiences as a basis for understanding our world, to a questioning of the social processes of their ‘construction’ (Gergen, 1985)”
8. “a shift away from investigations *based* in foundations already accepted as authoritative...towards modes of investigation which allow for error correction ‘on the spot’...which find their warrants in locally constituted situations or circumstances”

For me this creates a number of problems that I have already explored in the previous section. These problems rest on both the conception of the ‘learners’ who are the subjects of my study and on the role of the researcher.

Firstly, I have problems with the shift of emphasis from private reflection to the processes of social construction; from what goes on in the heads of individuals to an interest in the social surroundings. I construe the ‘individual’ as certainly embedded within networks of meaning and social constraints, but as ultimately able to use the power of language through the processes of reflection and sensemaking, in order to construct a different set of meanings. One recalls Lyotard’s corrective:

“No one, not even the least privileged among us, is ever entirely powerless over the messages that traverse and position him at the post of sender, addressee, or referent.” (Lyotard, 1979:15).

Indeed, Lyotard attributes change and creativity in the system to the power of the individual vis-a-vis the systems of meaning. Postmodernists rarely refer to the individual’s power to challenge social constraints and to critique the systems of meaning promulgated by self-interested elites (unless they happen to be postmodern academics). But highly complex systems of signifiers and signs can promote freedom as well as constrain it. The lone philosopher, the contemplative monk, the reclusive author all make sense of experience within a given discourse (philosophy, religion, literature) but how and why did they choose this discourse and what do they do with these discourses in their heads? What are they doing as they quietly make sense of their lives by playing with, reconstructing and deconstructing language? Are all private sensemaking activities preordained to fail? To what extent must private sensemaking be validated by the social environment? Is it enough for the recluse to find just one person to validate his private sensemaking in order for it/him to obtain some kind of existence in the world? Why, for example, does a manager decide to leave his or her job and become a campaigner against global capitalism? How do individuals make sense of their lives in contradistinction to the dominant modes of discourse within which they find themselves? Is this partly due to the fact that language, through its very complexity allows for equifinality and facticity (Weick, 1995)? Is it also partly connected with the ways in which certain ways of making sense simply do not ‘feel right’? It is my contention that the values embedded in certain ways of making sense may contradict our personal set of values (whether learned, experienced and constructed, or given by a prior discourse) which in turn generates dissonant emotional states (Vince, 2001; Fineman, 1997; Rokeach, 1973).

Hence, in opposition to Shotter, I believe that it is the process of reflection upon experience that stimulates the learning that will enable us to challenge the discourse that currently imprisons us. Whilst we may ‘go along’ with dominant discourses, in our most private moments we may be motivated to explore our subjective feeling states and work out, with the creativity afforded us through the complexity of language, what this means for us – in contradistinction to ‘others’. This meaning making function ascribed to individuals is certainly constrained by culture and language and our embeddedness, but as Lyotard points out, we have power in relation to the multiplicity of discourses available to us. In effect, we can exercise choice. And it is not the discourse that chooses to annihilate itself in favour of another – it is a self that does this through the ongoing process of identity construction (Watson, 1994; Weick 1995). Weick quotes Starbuck and Milliken to make a similar point:

“Facing such a world (of antithetical processes) realistic people have to have numerous sensemaking frameworks that contradict each other. These numerous frameworks create plentiful interpretive opportunities – if an initial framework fails, one can try its equally plausible converse, or try a framework that emphasizes different elements. Thus meanings are generally cheap and easily found...People have confidence that they can eventually make sense of almost any situation because they can. (Starbuck and Milliken, 1988 quoted in Weick, 1995:137)

Hence, I am interested in how the individual ‘constructs’ and makes sense of her world when not in groups, indeed in contradistinction to those groups and dominant discourses. Whilst certain totalitarian ideologies would like the individual to be subsumed within the group, the stories of people who have suffered such attempts, would indicate that there *is* a crucial difference between group and individual learning<sup>2</sup>. Indeed, these stories show how new discourses and systems of meaning are often born out of this tension – much as Lyotard and indeed Weick describes.

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<sup>2</sup> See for example: Wild Swans (Chang, 2003) the true story of a woman brought up under the Cultural Revolution; A Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich, (Solzhenitsyn, 2000) an account based on his experience in a Soviet prison camp; Viktor Frankl’s (1959) experience of his time in a Nazi concentration camp is specifically about how the individual’s ability to create his own meaning (in opposition to the group) is the key to physical survival. Letters from Sachiko (Trager, 1984) is a story of how a Japanese woman attempts to create her own identity as an independent woman in a society that attempts to suppress both independence and women in general.

At the end of the day, it is the process of identity formation and reality construction that goes on inside the heads of individuals that fascinates me. Not because the social context is unimportant but rather because of the tension represented by the social and the individual - the needs of discourses to reproduce themselves and the constant drive of human beings to creatively transcend them. For this there has to be a 'self', there has to be a subjective 'experience' that is unique and which comprises one of the elements within the personal construction of meaning.

The second point that concerns me with regards to the postmodern stance is the tendency for the researcher to describe practices and to avoid any attempt to construct theory. The process of theory construction is a fundamental human drive (Kelly, 1955; Weick, 1995). These theories need not be 'fundamental truth' claims; they can, as Shotter points out, simply provide us with tools that enable:

“error correction ‘on the spot’ ...which find their warrants in locally constituted situations or circumstances” .

Indeed theories should themselves be subject to this 'error correction on the spot' and hence be living, growing, changing language games. But to paraphrase Lewin there is nothing more useful than a good language game. And if a language game appears to describe regularities in our experience and hence enables us to have a shot at a bit of prediction then as long as we recognise the tenuousness of this little truth claim, constantly adopting a position of doubt and detachment, then I see nothing wrong with the production of a useful, open theory. Whether we are stuck in the realm of signifiers or whether we truly can observe the signified and any regularities in the world of the signified is not an argument that we can address here. But whether we generate a theory of the signified or a theory that relates only to the signifier, this thesis will be looking for regularities that may eventually comprise a theory.

### ***3.2 Ontology and Epistemology – Assumptions Underlying this Thesis***

Given the array of approaches available within the learning field the first task of any researcher is to locate their own ontological and epistemological assumptions within a body of research or ‘community of practice’(Wenger, 1991) or ‘discourse’. From an interpretivist and social constructionist perspective this is about choosing what socially constituted conversation one wants to join. A postmodernist would ask, what discourses are you drawing on in order to bring meaning to your work. Or, as a realist might put it, you have to choose the most ‘truthful’ discipline – that is, the one that best reflects external reality.

I feel that the following are the most important assumptions that underlie my work:

#### ***1. Realism and Learning***

Learning is a real process located in the minds of individuals. Learning is a real process not just a discourse or fantasy. It can sometimes be observed and validated against commonly agreed criteria external to the individual (e.g. has the learner changed their behaviour, beliefs or emotional orientations?).

#### ***2. Subjectivism and Learning Through Experience***

Learning is at least partly a subjective process and the only way to understand it is by attempting to appreciate the subjective experience of the learner. This implies an existential psychology and phenomenological approaches to the study of learning.

#### ***3. The Importance of the ‘Self’***

Beliefs, feelings, goals, values, needs, attitudes etc are real. To have a goal is to experience a different physiological state from not having a goal (Le Doux, 1995). However, these states are experienced subjectively and uniquely by each individual.

Learning is filtered through the self and cannot be understood without it. I would go further than this however and posit a conscious, partly autonomous self exercising

choice in what discourses to listen to, what communities to join, what goals to adopt and what decisions to take.

#### **4. *The Problem of Defensiveness***

Perhaps the most important determinant of my epistemological preferences is my belief in the 'real' process of defensiveness, which must posit an external reality that the self is defending against. If there is no reality, there can be no defensiveness since then all defensiveness would constitute is simply an alternative, perhaps more emotional way of constructing reality. I believe however, that we are all subject to bias and defensiveness which is a real property of the human mind (Le Doux, 1997). When we become defensive we shut out aspects of the external reality that are disconfirming or uncomfortable for us. This defensiveness can often be observed by others who have a stake in the individual's learning – bosses, peers, direct reports etc.

#### **5. *The Role of Theory***

Because I believe my research has the potential to tap aspects of patterns and regularities in the subjective experience of learning, I intend to look for these patterns and to construct a tentative 'theory'. As stated before, whether we are stuck in the realm of signifiers or whether we truly can observe the signified is not the point. Wherever they exist (in the real world or in the world of signs or in my imagination), regularities and patterns can be observed and this work will be attempting to construct an account of those regularities. The real test of the theory will lie not in whether it is 'true' but in whether it is useful enough to become accepted in the wider society.

Bearing in mind these points, I am sympathetic to an interpretivist stance in the legislative tradition. I believe it is important to conduct grounded research (accessing the subjective constructions of people making sense of their own learning) in order to reveal regularities and patterns that underlie the subjective experiences of learning process.



Nevertheless I am also sympathetic to the notion of deconstructing an individual's learning. Having understood/entered into the individual's world, it is important to step back and deconstruct/critique the ways in which the individual has excluded certain meanings – often in pursuit of self interest and self enhancement.

Hence whilst the individual is the expert on his own learning the final picture of the learning process is a construction consisting of: the individual's insights into her own learning process; other stakeholders' observations of that learning process; and the researcher's observations all of which will be influenced by subjective paradigms, preferences and beliefs. Underlying these beliefs will be the dominant culturally 'given' theories of learning which will affect what we see and how we interpret it.

Hence, whilst the eventual 'story' of a person's learning over the year will inevitably be a 'construction' there will be some elements that are more likely to correspond to an underlying reality whilst other elements will be a reflection of mine, my participants' and our culture's belief and value systems.

## **Chapter 4. Methodology and Methods**

This chapter is separated into two parts. The first part (4.2) looks at the methodological choices I made as the PhD evolved and the rationale behind them. The second part (4.3) describes the sample of learners who participated in the research.

### **4.1 Introduction**

The question that drove the methodology was as follows:

*‘given the competing assumptions and unanswered questions regarding learning, how do managers and staff learn when their organisations go through change?’*

I have defined ‘learning’ (as outcome) as follows -

Learning takes place when the individual manifests:

- i. new or changed constructs, schemas and/or paradigms (including self concept)
- ii. new or changed emotional orientations (including self esteem)
- iii. new or changed behaviours.

The methodology therefore had to identify what learning processes generated changes in behaviour, beliefs and emotional orientation and show, to the extent this was possible, how these learning processes functioned. The research was not intended to test a particular learning theory. I wanted to explore an array of learning theories with regards to their explanatory power vis a vis the learning events and processes being described.

The methodology was intended to meet the following requirements:

- a) A longitudinal study focusing on an in-depth study of a small sample of individuals
- b) A sample large enough and diverse enough to allow comparisons
- c) Access to the subjective world of learners as they are learning
- d) The need to operationalise changed constructs, emotional orientations, behaviours and values
- e) The need to operationalise different learning processes
- f) Material rich enough to give us a fleeting glimpse of some of the tacit, psycho-dynamic forces underlying the more conscious experience of learning.

The following section shows how I developed the methodology to meet these requirements.

## **4.2 *Methodological Choices***

### **4.2.i) *The Multiple Case Study***

The question of ‘how’ adults learn when their organisations go through change focuses on learning as a process. Understanding the process of learning, over a period of organisational change, required a longitudinal design focused upon the learning of a number of individuals. The most important determinant for my methodological choices at this point was my conception of learning as located within the individual mind - influenced by the social, ‘situated’ within communities of practice but ultimately the activity of an individual meaning-creator.

I planned to conduct a number of individual case studies collecting a lot of data on each individual tracking the activities, emotions and interpretations involved in the learning process. The research was to be in-depth, focusing on intimate thoughts and emotions and maybe even attempting to shed some light on the underlying psycho-dynamic processes underpinning the learning.

As Runyan (1982) puts it:

“Case studies are primarily useful for tasks such as describing an individual’s experience, for developing idiographic interpretations of that experience, and

for developing context-specific predictions, plans and decisions” (Runyan, 1982: 125)

I was aiming to find out from ‘human lived experience’ (Travers, 2001: 17) how adults learned in their everyday lives, using the case studies to examine which of the existing theories seemed to have the most “explanatory force” (Runyan, 1982:45).

There are a number of well-documented issues surrounding the use of the case study as scientific method (Runyan, 1982; Travers 2001; Yin, 1989). These criticisms can be summarised as follows:

- i. generalisations cannot be derived from single case studies (they have low ‘external validity’, Runyan, 1982: 124).
- ii. the information is filtered through the researcher’s a priori theories – the case study can in effect say what you want it to say and hence has low ‘internal validity’ (Runyan, 1982: 124);
- iii. case studies are conducted with a lack of rigour, supplying masses of detail with no ‘scientific controls’ producing reports that are ‘scientifically weak’ with little or no predictive validity;
- iv. case studies are difficult to replicate;
- v. there are many ways of interpreting case study data and it is difficult to demonstrate the validity of one interpretation over another (Runyan, 1982: 38);
- vi. individual case studies may rely on introspective and retrospective accounts that are subject to bias and distortion.

Of course these points derive from a positivist set of assumptions and not all apply to this type of research. Nevertheless, let's look at the problem of generalisability. My question, ‘how do adults learn when their organisations go through change?’ implies findings that should be generalisable. It is unlikely that given one case study I would be justified in making general statements about how adults learn (as opposed to how this one adult learned) nor would I be able to evaluate the explanatory force of the competing theories simply by reference to one study. For this reason, I decided to study a ‘sample’ of learners in order to make comparisons across individuals. I was hoping to make the sample as diverse as possible, including different ages, genders,

roles, positions in the hierarchy, educational backgrounds, ethnic backgrounds etc. At the minimum I wanted two separate organisations. This was partly to do with issues surrounding generalisability but also a genuine curiosity to see the extent to which any patterns could be detected across a heterogeneous sample. As a result I decided to undertake a multiple case study.

The problem of ‘internal validity’ was more complex. I was of course biased. I had construed learning as located in the individual and adopted an interpretive stance, de-emphasising (for this study) postmodern and critical concerns regarding power and language. Furthermore, my notion of defensiveness implied an important interpretive role for the researcher which was in danger of leading to “irresponsible interpretation, or over-speculation” (Runyan, 1982: 151) on my part. When looking at defensiveness, therefore, I tried particularly hard, to avoid these traps, offering alternative explanations wherever possible. I also tried to look at the issue of defensiveness using the language of the diarist wherever possible. Hence, I may have juxtaposed two contradictory statements by the diarist, separated in time, in order to show how the conflict between them could have led to the defensive behavioural outcome under question. This hopefully reduced the problem of internal validity. Finally, in the case of four diarists, I was able to check my analysis with them, giving them the opportunity to give me feedback on how I had interpreted their data.

The problem of ‘scientific rigour’ appears less relevant in the context of an interpretive epistemology. Nevertheless, I am looking for ‘patterns’ and tentative ‘theories’ though not for purposes of prediction. Hence some ‘rigour’ was achieved due to the in-depth nature of the analysis (see below), the common structure that facilitated the analysis and presentation of the data (enabling cross comparisons), the multiple methods of data collection (including 360 feedback, diaries, interviews, emotion charts) and the feedback on the analysis from the participants themselves.

Finally, we have the problem of the ‘frailty’ of accounts – both the researcher’s and the diarists. There are many ways to account for the data in the case studies and both mine and the individual diarist’s accounts are subject to bias, misinterpretation and distortion. As stated above, I tried to account for these by using multiple case studies, multiple sources of information, offering where possible alternative theories

to account for phenomena, using the diarists' own words as much as possible, offering the type of information that will allow the reader to draw their own conclusions and being sensitive to my own biases and predilections.

Finally, Runyan offers guidelines for assessing explanations in case studies:

“Explanations and interpretations can be evaluated in light of criteria such as 1) their logical soundness, 2) their comprehensiveness in accounting for a number of puzzling aspects of the events in question, 3) their survival of tests of attempted falsification, such as test of derived predictions or retrodictions, 4) their consistency with the full range of available relevant evidence 5) their support from above, or their consistency with more general knowledge about human functioning or about the person in question, and 6) their credibility relative to other explanatory hypotheses” (Runyan, 1982:47).

I tried to use these criteria to guide my own case study construction with the diarists.

#### **4.2.ii) *Methods of Data Collection: Interviews, Diaries and 360 Feedback***

At this point it should be recognised that my construal of ‘the individual as sense-maker’ and of learning as something that ultimately resides in the heads of individual sense-makers immediately excluded certain methodologies where the focus lies more on the socially constituted aspects of learning and meaning creation. I had defined learning outputs in terms of changes in beliefs, behaviour and emotional orientation and my main challenge was to identify methods for capturing these outputs.

The methods available to capture learning (both outputs and processes) were varied, but ultimately I had to choose between the following approaches:

- ◆ ‘thick’ ethnographic studies – including participant observation, interviews and diaries (Travers, 2001:19)

- ◆ less intensive ethnographic studies using observational techniques within specific de-limited contexts such as ‘meetings’ or ‘visits to clients’, maybe using grounded theory to analyse the data
- ◆ mapping techniques such as repertory grid, causal mapping, content analysis, argument mapping or semiotics (cf. Huff, 1990)
- ◆ questionnaires, 360 feedback.

Despite the distinct advantages of an ethnographic study a number of constraints prevented me from adopting this technique:

- ◆ the two organisations that eventually agreed to participate were at opposite ends of the country (Kent and Manchester);
- ◆ the different levels in the hierarchy (from board member to consultant) would have had implications for an ethnographic study. Travers (2001:35) paraphrases Goffman: “you can’t move down a social system. You can only move up a social system”. Whilst he recommends that the researcher starts at the bottom and moves up, this would have been extremely time-consuming.
- ◆ My own personal constraints (working and raising a family) would have made it impossible for me to conduct ethnographic research.

Having considered and rejected a ‘thick’ ethnographic approach I was actively considering two alternatives – (cognitive) mapping and a more limited ethnographic-inspired approach using video cameras, interviews and observation of defined contexts such as Board meetings.

Bearing in mind what we knew about learning both methods were problematical. A limited ethnographic study, focusing, say on observations of Board meetings, or even on day-to-day encounters in the office, would have contained an insuperable flaw – they would assume that the learning experienced by the learner would have been manifested in that context. It is only after collecting evidence from the diaries that we see the enormity of this assumption. If we take the General Manager in the study, for example, much of his learning was manifested in his interactions with those above

him in the hierarchy. His main 'learning domain' was in dealing with power, politics and influence within the senior levels of the hierarchy. At the beginning of the year neither he nor I would have guessed this. He had decided that he had reached the peak of his career as he did not want to get involved in the political machinations inevitable if he were to be promoted. He intended to focus his attention on 'developing' the younger managers beneath him and on changing the culture of the depot he was in charge of. Had I followed his progress in, say developing his management team, sitting in on their management meetings, I would have missed a large proportion of his learning. Indeed, management meetings only received two mentions in his diaries over the year and his management team received not many more. It seems that if one is to conduct an ethnographic study that is intended to capture learning in all its manifestations, then it has to be a *full* ethnographic study in order to capture the apparently chaotic and subtle nature of the learning process.

Initially then I chose to 'map' participants' learning over the year. According to Huff (1990) there are five main mapping choices. These range from simple "mapping methods that deal with 'manifest content'" to those that "involve considerable interpretation on the part of the researcher"(1990:14). Simple, content based maps are those where "words and related sets of words are counted" and "verbal expression is taken as a direct indication of mental activity". More complex maps have been developed in the fields of anthropology, linguistics, literary criticism and artificial intelligence. They draw on "more complicated models of cognition" and the assumption is that "manifest content has to be further analyzed before cognitive structure can be identified". The most complex maps according to Huff are those which specify schemas, frames and perceptual codes.

I wanted to devise a method that would enable me to map these schemas in addition to capturing changes in emotional orientations and behaviour. I chose therefore to conduct an interview at the beginning of the year, an interview at the end of the year and to ask participants to complete a learning diary during the year. Given this I could use the Decision Explorer software to map the learning processes that were giving rise to the learning outputs.



	<b>Capturing existing schemas, emotional orientations and behaviours</b>	<b>Capturing the process of learning/mapping learning</b>	<b>Capturing changes in schemas, emotional orientations and behaviour.</b>
<b>Data capture</b>	Structured Interviews 360 feedback (behaviours)	diaries	Final structured interviews Diaries 360 feedback
<b>Data analysis 1</b>	Mapping learning outputs - changes in schemas, emotional orientations and behaviour  Mapping the relevant learning processes – using 15 processes derived from the literature and refined through application to the data		
<b>Data analysis 2</b>	Compare and contrast the learning of 21 diarists looking for common patterns and processes that are evident in the maps		

Interviews were a flexible method for capturing schemas and one which had already gained support in the literature (Huff, 1990:85). Given this I could use the first interview to identify initial beliefs, feelings and, to a certain extent, behavioural preferences at the beginning of the year. The second interview would allow me to identify and explore any changes in beliefs, feelings and behaviours (in addition to those revealed through the diaries). Hence I had a method for capturing learning outputs over the year. In addition both interviews enabled me to develop bonds of trust and friendship with my interviewees which in turn gave me access to information that would normally have been withheld (in one case a senior manager broke down confiding in me his deepest personal insecurities; in another, a woman shared with me the harassment problems she was experiencing from her senior manager).

The diary was my main method for capturing the actual ‘process of learning’ over the year. Diaries have played a role in some of the earliest ethnographic studies (Travers 2001: 19) but are now more commonly associated with humanistic approaches to learning focusing on the importance of reflection as a means of sense-making (Raelin, 2001). In these cases, however, the diaries are used as a learning aid aimed at helping the learner rather than a tool for the researcher. It is more unusual to use ‘diaries’ as a major live research tool (as opposed to using them as historical documents). Clearly diaries have both advantages and disadvantages. The advantages are as follows:

- ◆ diaries could give me an insight into the dynamics of experiencing and learning within a short time frame, reducing the problems associated with memory, post-rationalisation and cognitive dissonance (suppressing dissonant thoughts and attempting to create more order where there was none)
- ◆ writing diaries on a month by month basis should give an insight into how the learner changes gradually over time, giving us a fuller ‘story’ of the vagaries, difficulties and complexities associated with the change;
- ◆ diaries can give us a glimpse of the intimate thoughts of the individual bearing in mind that the ‘audience’ is not physically present when they are being written, then the ‘self-presentation’ effect MAY be lessened;
- ◆ diaries allow the writers to write about what interests them; the lack of structure allows the diaries to be used as a recording of the incidents and thoughts of most importance to the diarist;
- ◆ given this lack of structure, the diarist can write about changes in behaviour, emotions or attitudes and therefore can be more holistic records of learning.

Despite these advantages however, there are also significant disadvantages:

- ◆ impression management – diaries are liable to be distorted by the need to present a ‘good’ image of oneself to the reader (Fiske and Taylor, 1991:231). The knowledge that they are going to be read by an outsider will limit the extent to which the diaries reflected a deep and personal rather than sanitised version of events.
- ◆ variations in quality – people will differ in the extent to which they are willing or able to write in-depth accounts of their own learning. Some diaries will provide in-depth, analytical accounts, some will provide short descriptions of key events only.
- ◆ levels of commitment – busy managers and staff can find the process of writing a diary a distraction and a chore – one more thing to add to

the 'to do' list. There is a real danger that people will drop out half way through the study. This is a danger inherent in many longitudinal research studies (Sullivan et al, 1996).

- ◆ dependence on 'writing' abilities – again the quality of the diaries will depend upon the respondents' abilities to express themselves in writing;
- ◆ sample bias – the willingness to commit to writing a monthly diary will bias the sample. It is likely to favour a more literate, perhaps thoughtful group of people who would be willing to make a substantial time commitment in order to gain the benefits of participation in the study;
- ◆ confidentiality – the diaries would only work if people were convinced of its confidentiality.

These are significant drawbacks. However, I felt strongly that the advantages in terms of gaining closer access to how people really thought outweighed the disadvantages. Moreover, I felt I could alleviate the disadvantages to some extent. A lot of this could be done by building personal relationships of trust with the participants; the more they trusted me, the more they would 'open up' in their diaries. Furthermore, the greater the degree of trust, the less likely they would be to drop out.

In practice the disadvantages were less problematic than at first anticipated. Firstly, there was a sample bias, but not one that I had anticipated. Those who felt negatively towards the organisation or its management did not wish to participate. Hence in both cases the sample was biased towards those who in some way shared the dominant managerial values.

The problems of impression-management varied. There were probably four different kinds of people in this respect:

1. those who laid themselves very bare in the diaries (often those who I became very close to)

2. those who revealed a lot about their learning over the year. Some of these may have begun the diaries by presenting a good image of themselves but gradually changed as the diaries progressed. Others simply presented a lot of information that was very useful in charting their learning.
3. those who presented a persona in the diaries but even that persona learned!
4. those who did not experience/present a lot of intense deep learning over the year.

In reality there were only two people whom I felt were so defensive that they did not present anything like a true picture of what they were experiencing. One of these dropped out after completing the first diary. The other, having given me diaries with very little substance (e.g. whole months described as 'nothing learned') was eliminated from the study after problems with recording the second interview. All the rest fell into the first three categories.

Levels of quality did indeed vary but people were generally very receptive to any feedback they received from me. In fact, many were concerned that they were completing the diaries 'correctly' and wanted feedback to ensure that what they were giving me was in fact what I wanted.

The problem of people dropping out did not become an issue. From an original group of twenty-two, one was eliminated due to problems of quality (see above), leaving me with a group of twenty-one diarists.

Hence many of the problems associated with the diary method were assuaged, whilst the benefits of using the diaries have been immense. They have turned what could have been a quite mechanistic, limited study into a much more rounded holistic study of learning.

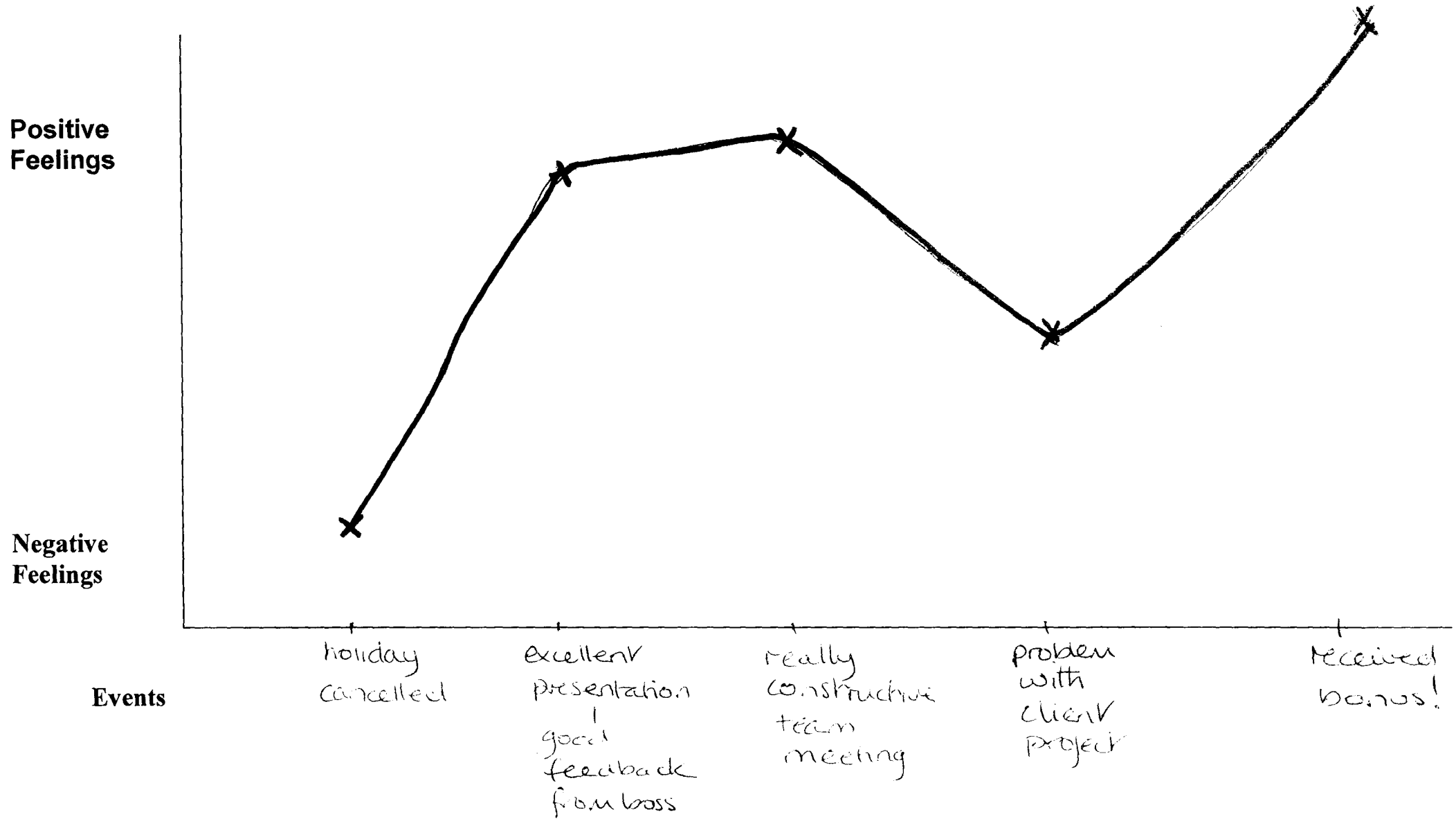
I asked the diarists for descriptions of emotions, thoughts and attitudes and new skills and behaviours. In addition I asked them to record their emotions over the month on a separate 'event line' or 'emotion chart', that simply recorded highs and lows. A sample of both the diary and the event line is enclosed overleaf.

## EXAMPLE

<b>Main Triggers -</b> Anything that prompts new thoughts, feelings or behaviours eg. events, problems, courses, books, observations etc.	<b>Learning Responses</b> Thoughts - New ideas, understandings, insights. New questions or problems. Ideas reinforced, weakened. Feelings re: Self, Others, Situation Behaviours - New skills, new ways of responding to situations, new situations, experiments. Observations - about self or others.
<b>EXAMPLE</b>  Good client meeting  Training course  Boss presentation	<b>EXAMPLE</b>  <b>Great meeting with client today. She gave me some good feedback regarding my work and told me how much they like our professionalism.</b>  <b>Training course was OK. Didn't feel I learned a lot because it was not directly relevant to my area.</b>  <b>Boss gave a good presentation today. I found I learned just by looking at what he did right. I think next time I give a presentation I'll make sure I relax a lot more and build up a rapport with the audience. In this way, everyone relaxes and listen a lot more.</b>

# Eventline of the Month: February

## EXAMPLE



A final addition at this point was the inclusion of 360 feedback. I was intending to include this as an alternative source of data on behaviour change. Diarists were asked to give out questionnaires to their direct reports, peers and bosses. These proved very useful adjuncts in helping to interpret what was happening but unfortunately, whilst everyone completed them at the beginning of the study only six diarists completed them at the end. This was partly due to the fact that some of them had left their organisation but it was also because people were tired and were not motivated to complete the second 360. For those who did, the information gained was extremely useful and was incorporated into the case studies.

#### **4.2.iii            *Operationalising Learning***

Having designed the methods of data capture I had to then operationalise the learning processes in order to map any learning that occurred.

I began by identifying all the possible learning processes from the literature. There were almost as many definitions of learning as there were authors. Indeed Huber (1991) and Crossan et al (1994) identify “inconsistent terminology applied to comparable concepts” (Huber, 1991) as one of the main barriers in the development of the organizational learning field. I derived an initial list of learning processes from terms and/or concepts that appeared to surface most often in works about learning. This list comprised 23 learning processes, many of which overlapped. This is partly as a result of different communities using different words for similar constructs. Hence experiential learning is known as expert learning by those interested in compiling expert systems and ‘action learning’ by those interested in ‘management development’.

I used this initial list to start mapping the learning described in the first interviews and early diaries. As each diarist described what they learned and how, these initial processes were used to ‘map’ the learning. Over time those that emerged as being most effective at mapping learning whilst being also conceptually distinct were as follows:

**1. *declarative learning***

The conscious, cognitive memorisation of facts or bodies of knowledge that can be subsequently articulated and imparted to others by means of the spoken or written word.

**2. *discursive learning***

Discursive learning is constituted in the discourse that takes place between people as they construct, deconstruct and reconstruct the meanings and practices inherent in their shared experiences.

**3. *emotional learning***

Any emotional response that generates further questions and sensemaking (i.e. shock often leads to the question ‘why did that happen’; guilt may lead to the question ‘how do I alleviate my guilt’; fear often leads to the question ‘what do I do to minimise the risk?’)

**4. *practical or procedural learning***

The process of performing a job or task which in often unconscious ways contains a degree of novelty that is subsequently integrated into one’s existing schema or behavioural repertoire or emotional orientation.

**5. *coaching***

A discussion guided by a skilled facilitator intended to generate learning.

**6. *experimental/innovative learning***

The process of establishing and executing informal ‘experiments’ in order to address the question of ‘what works’.

**7. *imaginative learning***

The process of ‘imagining’ what might or could be. Future directed thinking – planning, anticipating, wishing, hoping, envisioning.



**8. *feedback***

The process of forming meaning based upon information concerning the results of one's actions.

**9. *reflection***

The process of constructing, reconstructing and deconstructing meaning around past events, their implications and consequences.

**10. *rehearsal***

The conscious mental and behavioural practise of a performance that is anticipated to occur some time in the future.

**12. *training***

The process of being taught a specified body of skills and/or emotional orientations by means of a formal, pre-defined method possibly led by an individual construed as being more expert.

**13. *vicarious learning***

The process of observing other people's actions and reactions together with the consequences of those actions in order to generate new meanings and behaviours for oneself.

**14. *comparative learning***

The process of comparing or contrasting two different phenomena in order to derive new meaning.

**15. *Tacit Learning***

The acquisition of or change in constructs, behaviours and/or emotional orientations without the conscious awareness of the process taking place.

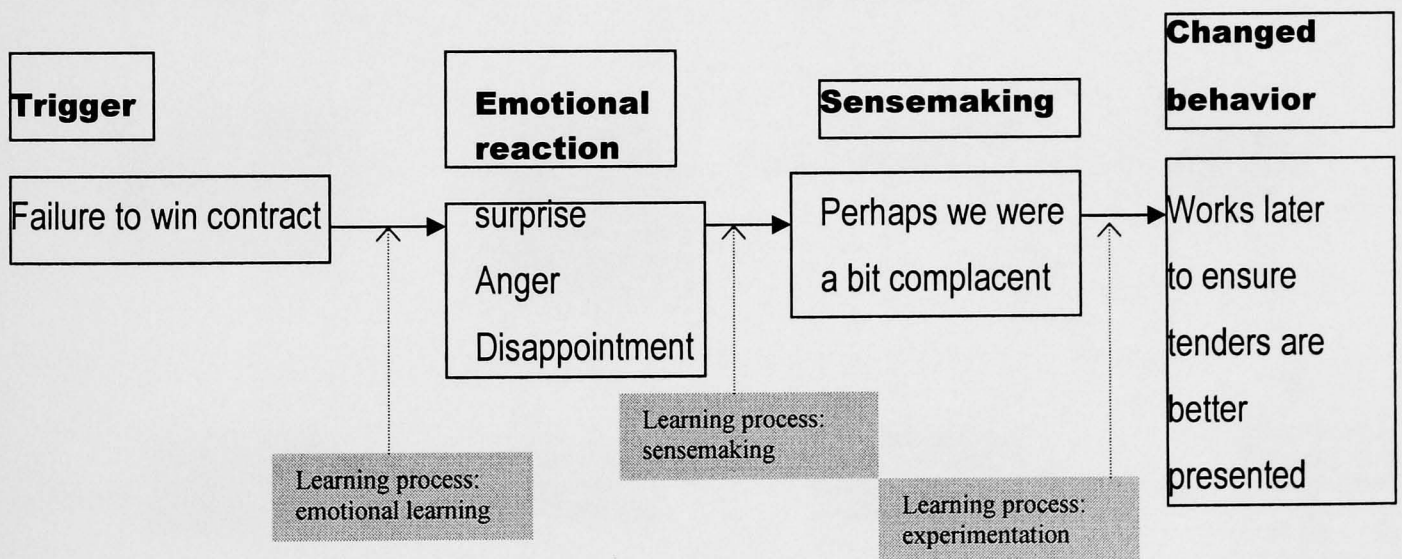
Although my study was not designed to capture tacit learning I added to the list to give me a possible way of explaining some of the learning I was observing.

\* \* \*

I then had to link learning processes to learning outcomes – what types of processes generated specific learning outcomes. The method evolved as follows:

1. I started out by identifying what each participant had learned in terms of learning outcomes (e.g. Steve changed his behaviour by leaving the organisation; Jim changed his beliefs regarding power and politics).
2. I then intended to trace these learning outcomes back through the diaries identifying **events and psychological processes** that seemed to generate any learning relevant to this domain. I intended to use Decision Explorer to capture and map the learning processes behind each learning outcome.
3. Having traced this development I would then construct the story, as I saw it, of their learning.

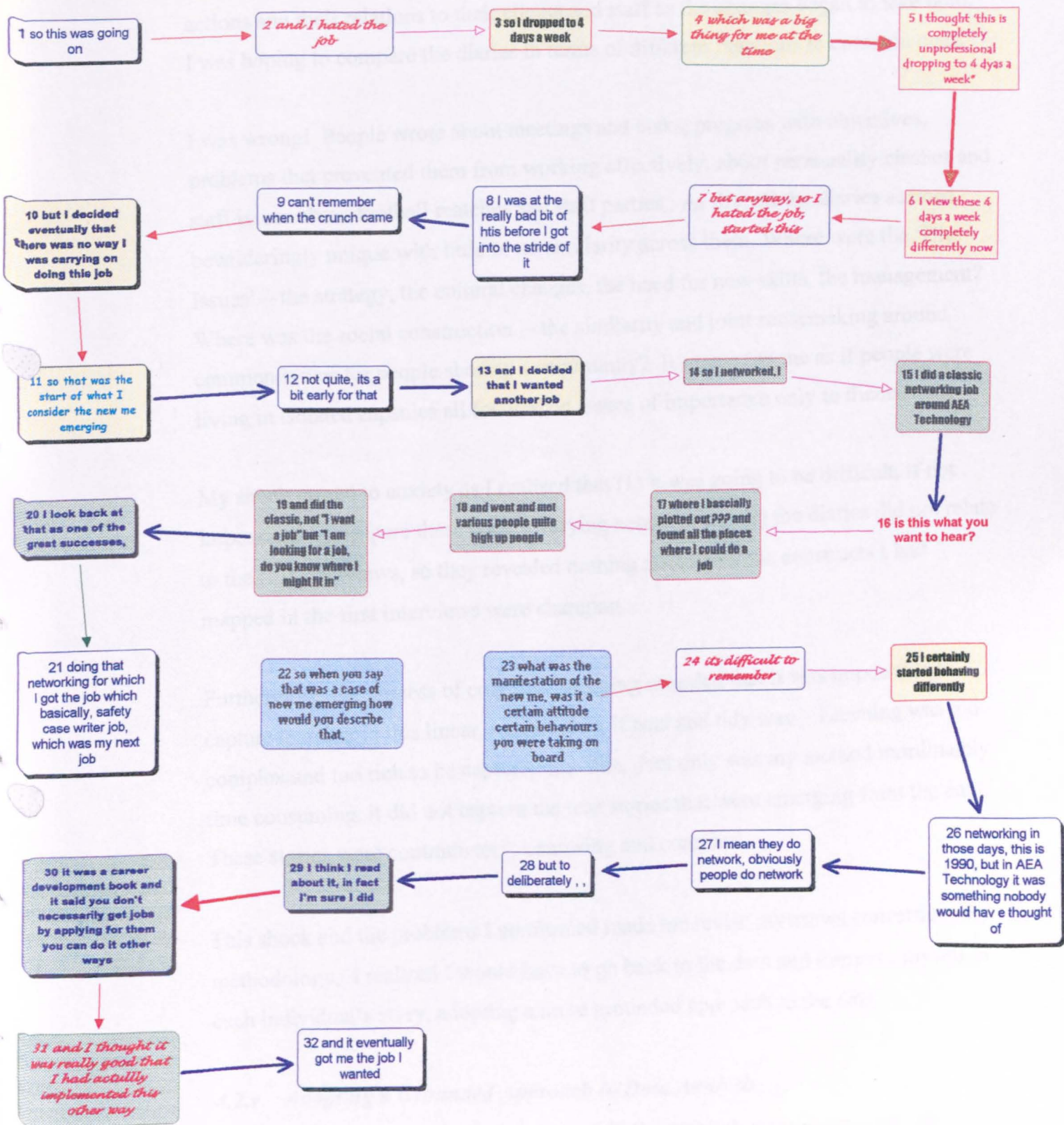
It was only when I started to map the learning processes as they appeared in the diaries that I realised my original methodology was flawed. The mapping of the learning generated a linear representation of which the following diagram is a simple example (a fuller example appears overleaf):



It soon became clear that this was not going to work.

#### 4.2. iv *Abandoning Mapping*

My first reaction on receiving the diaries as they began to trickle through was ‘surprise’. I had based the first interviews upon the expectation that people would be learning about the company’s change programme, its change in culture and strategy,



catalyst	change behaviour	change construct	change feelings	change selfconcept	change values
existing construct	existing feelings	new behaviour	new construct	new feelings	open construct

the implications for the diarists in terms of the need to change management style and skills, their feelings about the ‘rightness’ and ‘wrongness’ of certain management actions and their relations to their clients and staff as the changes began to take hold. I was hoping to compare the diaries in terms of different reactions to common cues.

I was wrong! People wrote about meetings and tasks, progress with objectives, problems that prevented them from working effectively, about personality clashes and staff issues about football matches and staff parties. At first all the diaries seemed bewilderingly unique with little or no similarity across them. Where were the ‘Big Issues’ – the strategy, the cultural changes, the need for new skills, the management? Where was the social construction – the similarity and joint sensemaking around common issues for people sharing a community? It seemed to me as if people were living in isolated capsules all focused on issues of importance only to themselves.

My shock turned to anxiety as I realised that (1) it was going to be difficult, if not impossible to compare these widely varying accounts and (2) the diaries did not relate to the first interviews, so they revealed nothing about how the constructs I had mapped in the first interviews were changing.

Furthermore, the process of cognitive mapping revealed that it was impossible to capture learning in this linear, mechanistic, if neat and tidy way. Learning was too complex and too rich to be captured like this. Not only was my method inordinately time consuming, it did not capture the true stories that were emerging from the data. These stories were contradictory, confusing and complex.

This shock and the problems I confronted made me revise my views concerning my methodology. I realised I would have to go back to the data and immerse myself in each individual’s story, adopting a more grounded approach to the data.

#### ***4.2.v Adopting a Grounded Approach to Data Analysis***

The methods of data collection employed in the research were appropriate for subjecting to grounded analysis. Transcripts of interviews, 3<sup>rd</sup> party feedback and diaries could all be subjected to line by line coding, if that were appropriate. As Charmaz points out, the hallmark of grounded theory lies in the approach to coding



and theory development rather than any particular method of data collection (Charmaz, 2000: 510).

The problem I faced at this juncture is that I had already developed pre-existing codes in the form of the 'learning processes'. According to Glaser (1992) this is anathema. The codes must emerge from the data and the temptation to fit data into pre-existing codes must be avoided at all costs:

“Categories emerge upon comparison and properties emerge upon more comparison. And that is all there is to it” (Glaser 1992:43)

However, Glaser is arguing his case in contradistinction to Strauss and Corbin (1990) who tend to adopt less of a purist view. They tend to shape their codes and concepts by filtering them through *pre-existing* questions, hypotheses and methodological practices which they claim is a development of Glaser and Strauss' original work (Charmaz, 2000).

Sensitive to this debate I decided to adopt a coding technique based on the questions I had previously defined (what leads to changes in behaviour, emotional orientation or constructs?). I decided to keep the 15 pre-existing learning processes as codes. This could be justified to a certain extent as I had refined these by adopting a line by line coding technique using Decision Explorer. However, I did not limit myself to these codes. More codes emerged as I immersed myself in the data, and in the fashion of Strauss and Corbin, I developed these codes and concepts through questions, emerging hypotheses and intuitive insights. As a result further analytic concepts emerged from the data that surprised me and yet made major contributions to the theory outlined here. I eventually ended up with 33 codes. In addition to the 15 learning processes the following codes emerged from close reading of the diarists' stories:

alignment, assimilation, attention, blind spots, drives, dissonance, empathy, guilt, goals, paradigms, primary appraisal, risk, self esteem, self concept, sensemaking, style, values, vision.

In fact the original 15 codes played a minor part in the final conclusions. The main theory is based upon the codes derived from the grounded analysis of the diarists' stories. These include the four constructs I eventually labelled as drivers of learning (self esteem, goals, values and psychological well-being) and the five learning states (visionary, adaptive, dissonant, intrinsic and incidental).

As the coding developed incipient theories evolved as well. These were constantly tested against the data emerging from the diaries. Eventually I developed a tentative 'theory' of learning that needed to be tested in terms of its explanatory power vis s vis the individual stories I was encountering. Glaser has four main criteria for theories and concepts originating from grounded analysis – fit, work, relevance and modifiability (Glaser, 1992). Do the data fit the theory? Does the theory “provide a useful conceptual rendering and ordering of the data that explains the studied phenomena” (Charmaz, 2000:511). Is it relevant in explaining some of the problems and issues associated with learning as outlined in the literature review? Lastly, is it flexible enough to account for variation? By applying the theory to each individual story we would discover whether it fitted the data, whether it worked, whether it was relevant and if it was flexible enough to account for a wide variety of learning experiences.

Hence I decided to go back to each participant and tell their individual story using the words of the diarist but using the emergent learning theory to provide a “useful conceptual rendering and ordering of the data” (Charmaz, 2000:511), testing it for fit, relevance and flexibility. The method most suited to performing this task was the psycho-biography.

Hence the new methodology looked as follows:

	<b>Capturing existing schemas, emotional orientations and behaviours</b>	<b>Capturing the process of learning/mapping learning</b>	<b>Capturing changes in schemas, emotional orientations and behaviour.</b>
<b>Data capture</b>	Semi-structured Interviews 360 feedback (behaviours)	Diaries	Final semi-structured interviews Diaries 360 feedback
<b>Data analysis 1</b>	Identifying learning outputs - changes in schemas, emotional orientations and behaviour  Tracing the learning that led to each output and deriving a theory based upon grounded analysis and coding.		
<b>Data analysis 2</b>	Delineating the new learning theory. Constructing the psycho-biography of each individual's learning in order to test the relevance, fit, flexibility and 'explanatory power' of the new theory.		

#### **4.2.vi) *Psycho-Biographical Accounts of Learning***

At this stage I had to develop a method that would enable me to:

- do justice to the individual and highly personal stories that were emerging from the diaries
- structure 21 different accounts of learning in a way that would enable cross comparisons
- test the theory that had emerged from the initial coding stage.

The method that seemed best suited for this was the psychobiography.

What exactly is a psycho-biography? Runyan (1982) in his book 'Life Histories and Psychobiographies', strangely does not provide a definition but rather subsumes psycho-biography under the study of 'individual life histories'. He is firstly concerned to distinguish between life history as a method and life history as a subject matter. Life history as a method is simply "having a respondent recount the story of his or her life" (6). Life history as subject matter however, is more to do with generating understandings around the subjective experiences and objective actions of an individual over his or her life course. It should be clear then that we are interested in life history as subject matter rather than method.

What, though, does it mean to generate understandings around the subjective experiences and objective actions of an individual over his or her life course? Here Runyan is concerned to explore the relationships between nomothetic and idiographic

levels of analysis. The examination of life histories from a biographical perspective is, of course, an idiographic exercise. The study of the life of Van Gogh, is not intended to generate insights or laws that apply to all human beings. However, as Runyan points out, the study of large samples of individuals may produce broad generalisations about human behaviour which “can be applied only with great caution to particular individuals (Chassan, 1979), as the relationship between variables in a group study may be very different from the relationship of these variables within a single individual.” (1982:9). Psycho-biographies are attempts to bring these two levels together. Whilst focusing on the unique circumstances of an individual’s life, psycho-biographers refer to psychological theory in order to reveal possible psychological forces that may be operating within that individual’s life. Psycho-biography is an attempt to use psychological theory to understand the subjective experiences and objective actions of a unique individual.

Hence the psychobiography was ideally suited to the task I had set myself – to focus on the individual’s story but using learning theory to reveal the pattern of forces operating in that person’s life.

There is, in this definition, a deliberate tension – between the uniqueness of the individual and the universal claims of theory. It is the role of psycho-biography to continuously grapple with that tension. If one focuses too much on the individuality, one loses the potential generalisability that contributes to theory. If one focuses too much on generalisability, the individual’s life becomes distorted in the attempt to substantiate theoretical claims.

Critics of psycho-biography claim that one human life can be used to substantiate any theory you like (Runyan, 1982:48). For example Runyan describes “thirteen different psychodynamic explanations for why Van Gogh cut off his ear and gave it to a prostitute” (1982:41). If one theory can generate thirteen different explanations, this must generate doubts about the internal validity of that theory as an analytic tool. Where then does that leave us?

“How should we interpret these alternative explanations? Are all of them true, are some true and some false, or, perhaps, are none of them true? Do the



various explanations conflict, so that if one is chosen then one or more of the others must be rejected, or do a number of them supplement each other? Is there, perhaps, some other explanation that would replace all of these possibilities? Do we end up with a feeling that we understand Van Gogh's behaviour, that we know why he acted as he did?" (Runyan, 1982:42)

Runyan responds:

"A third approach is to work from the assumption that several of these explanations may be valid while the others may not, and that procedures for critically evaluating alternative explanations are needed in order to assess their relative credibility" (1982:43)

This raises the question: 'what are these critical evaluative methods'? In the Van Gogh case, Runyan refers to other items of evidence that may support an explanation or make it less likely. These may consist of diaries, letters, mentions by friends and family of Van Gogh, incidents that were taking place in the news and in his personal life etc. Runyan claims that when looking more closely at such explanations it appears that some evidence is more reliable than others (1982:45).

But we should not only be concerned with reliability of evidence:

"The evidence presented must, in addition to being reliable in itself, be shown to have explanatory relevance or explanatory force in relation to the events in question." (Runyan, 1982: 46)

This is similar to Glaser's criteria for an effective theory – does it work, does it actually explain what is happening? According to Runyan, 'explanatory force' derives from the ability to provide a causal account of the events under study. This may be done through the employment of an extant theory (e.g. Freudian theory); through the presentation of 'reasons' that the agent may have had for acting in that way; and through the construction of "a coherent narrative linking the evidence to the event to be explained" (Runyan, 1982:46).

So the psycho-biography:

- i. attempts to grapple with the tension between general theory and individual uniqueness;
- ii. has to be sensitive to the fact that biographical data is susceptible to supporting a wide variety of theories. Hence any theory based upon an individual life should claim further support from other sources;
- iii. be subject to the criteria of ‘explanatory force’ – can the theory being used explain facets of the individual’s life in a compelling manner and yet also be applied to other individuals with similar effect.

In addition it is important to point out that psycho-biography will always remain in the realms of hypothesis. It may be disconfirmed if crucial evidence is proved unreliable or false, but it may never be confirmed as the data which might confirm it lie solely within the individual consciousness/subconscious of the person under study. This does not invalidate the work of psycho-biography however. Whilst psycho-biographers may fall into the trap of thinking “they know more about another person than that person does him- or herself” (Craib, 2001: 18) the point is that, thankfully perhaps, they can never prove it. As Craib points out:

“Psychoanalysis is a depth psychology. It offers, in the terms of modern critical realism (Bhaskar 1978, 1979), an analysis of underlying structures and mechanisms, not empirically available for observation, but none the less with effects that can be observed. We cannot see the unconscious, but we can see, hear and feel its effects” (Craib, 2001: 9).

What is crucial about this kind of analysis is that it *may* reveal truths (that cannot be proved at the time) but these are often intermingled with theories that are subsequently disproved – only time and constant attempts at disconfirmation will differentiate between the two. Freud’s work gives us some of the greatest examples of psychobiography. However, whilst the notion of the unconscious has entered mainstream culture, the idea of the Oedipus Complex, has not.

When applying these arguments to this research we also have to bear in mind

1. The learning biographies are the result of a much more collaborative effort. In effect they represent collaborations between researcher and diarist to identify the ways in which the individual learns. In fact, in retrospect, they should have been more collaborative. In the case of four diarists I managed to gain feedback on my final analysis of their learning over the year and I should have got more. This would be the equivalent of asking Van Gogh to comment on the thirteen explanations outlined by Runyan and using his own comments to evaluate the validity of each of them. Whilst there are limitations to this method (based on the constraints around recognising our own unconscious drives, Runyan, 1982: 42; Craib, 2001:9) it is more robust than simply not asking. This gives the biographies a degree of external validity.

2. Being focused upon learning and spread over one year, the data are more relevant and highly concentrated. The diarists wrote the diaries in order to record, explore and understand their own learning. As a result the diaries contain a lot of rich, concentrated and relevant data (as seen above). This gives the diaries a high degree of internal validity but...

3. ....the diaries are limited in that there is not much data outside the personal perspective of the diarist (for some there is more than for others). This is particularly important in learning as there are always other stakeholders in our learning. And whilst we may feel we have changed and learned, others may not see it this way. This limits the internal validity somewhat in that whilst a person may record behavioural learning sometimes this may be quite valid and sometimes it may reflect inner fantasies and defences.

It seemed to me that a psycho-biographical approach to each person's learning emerged as the best way of making sense of what was happening and as the best way of comparing each case study. Why was this?

1. In some cases diarists had high levels of self-awareness and revealed some of their own psycho-dynamic processes in the diaries. People commented, for example, on how their own insecurities, fears, hopes and fantasies were affecting how they made sense of events.

2. At some points defensiveness seems to be clearly influencing how people made sense of events. One diarist received some negative 360 degree feedback. The results contradicted the diarist's own self concept and she summarily dismissed the feedback, which was never mentioned again. The rejection of the possibility that there might be any truth in the feedback from her subordinates strongly suggests an underlying defensive dynamic here.<sup>3</sup> And there are similar examples throughout the diaries.

3. For me the most compelling reason driving the choice of a psycho-biographical approach, was a strong, underlying thematic unity in the diaries that often contradicted what diarists actually wrote. For example, one diarist got some feedback that his direct reports did not feel he supported them enough – he was too busy rushing round chasing business for himself. He accepted that there might have been some validity in this feedback and made a conscious decision to do something about it. However, having never mentioned his direct reports in his diary before the feedback he never mentioned them subsequently. And according to one of his direct reports (also a diarist) this remained a fault until the end. Here we see his attention pattern contradicting his consciously articulated intentions.

The diaries and interviews therefore tell us about the diarists both in terms of what they contain on the surface but also in terms of what the pattern of attention tells us and in terms of how people make sense of events. They contain immensely rich data that can be analysed on a number of different levels: what people say, what they pay attention to, what they do, how they make sense of events, themes underlying much of what they say (e.g. value judgements) and also what they do not say, do not do, do not pay attention to and how they do not make sense of events! If we add to this 360 feedback results together with comments from other diarists also involved in events, we have a rich source of data from which we can begin to determine themes and consistencies. If a person says one thing – A - but does another – B - and pays attention to B and makes sense of things in terms of how it affects B and other diarists claim that he is only interested in B, then we have an interesting dynamic.

Furthermore, if the diarist insists that he is not doing B but sticks to his belief that he

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<sup>3</sup> I also spoke to one of her direct reports who complained that this manager inappropriately divulged information about her divorce and used the direct report as a source of counselling. Hence, I became aware that her direct reports did in fact have some issues with her management style.

is doing A, a psycho-dynamic explanation is at the very least justified as a means of providing “explanatory force” for the apparent contradictions.

#### **4.2.vii) *The Structure of the Psycho-Biography***

As I traced the learning through from first interview, through the diaries to second interview a structure to this analysis began to emerge – this structure became the learning psycho-biography and I produced one for each participant. The following outlines the structure of the biography together with the rationale behind it:

##### **1. *Identify Learning Outcomes***

The first step was to identify the main learning outcomes that had taken place over the period. To do this I simply asked participants what had been the main learning over the period for them. In addition I gathered information from colleagues and 360 feedback to help identify learning outcomes and gain further insight into the perspective of the learner. In all but two cases the learning involved high levels of personal change – in constructs, in behaviour and in emotional orientation to someone or something.

Having asked them about their learning, I translated what they said into the learning outcomes I had previously defined (changed constructs, behaviour, emotional orientation etc.). The following is an example:

##### ***Changed Schema and Emotional Orientation to Manager***

From: “I have a new boss that I get on very well with”

To: “I still do feel that he’s really confused, emotionally and everything. He is trying to sort it out which is good but he’s very unpredictable so one day he’s up and one day he’s down and he can be both in the same day”

##### **2. *Identify People’s Attention Patterns***

One of the constructs that had emerged from the grounded analysis was ‘attention patterns’. I developed a method for tracking all the areas that people paid attention to in their diaries. Through a simple content analysis I recorded people’s attention pattern over the year (see John Eddy’s psychobiography in the next chapter).

### 3. Identify People's Goals and Values

In conducting the analysis of the attention patterns, I became aware that people's goals and values were influencing what they were paying attention to and how they were making sense of events. As a result, I used a thematic analysis of the interviews and diaries to outline what appeared to be important goals and values of each participant. The following excerpt from a learning biography shows how this was done using a content analysis. It lists what I see as the diarist's values and the evidence from the interviews and diaries that appear to support my views:

#### *Logic and Intelligence*

J values intelligence in others and tends to rely greatly on influencing people through logic. He tends to be critical of people whose intelligence does not match their role in the hierarchy (his senior management); he does value people who demonstrate high intelligence. He uses these words, together with 'logic' consistently in his evaluation of people:

"I am still concerned that they do not fully understand all the implications" (June)

"I am in danger of getting really upset with L because he does not seem to understand me, after 5 years or what is happening around him in terms of the company HR/Change strategy" (March)

"He is a strategic thinker who understands what the BEM can do for the company....at last" (July)

"No-one it seems is arguing with the logic of what I've presented and I'm hopeful that Richard will see the sense in it " (September)

"let's start with C, C has embraced the idea of processes very early on, he understood it immediately because he's got the intellectual capacity to understand it immediately" (i/v 2)

"An ideas man. Very quick witted, very intelligent" (i/v 2)

"Great analytical strength...he's got that kind of mind that can take 3, 4, 5 different pieces of information and understand what the links are, so excellent at that...Understands everything we're trying to do and understands the business backwards" (i/v 2)

Of course the weakness in this method is that it relies on articulated values. However, much of the value statements that come through are indirect – for example in assessing a previous manager a participant might call him dictatorial, someone who did not listen or share decision-making. These themes of not listening (for example) might appear consistently in other parts of the interviews or diaries without the participant being aware of this consistency. So in one sense they are values that are consciously articulated but they are also values that ‘leak’ out in the participants judgements, decisions and emotions. In this sense then I have not only captured ‘espoused theories’ but also ‘theories in use’ as they affect action, feeling and sensemaking.

#### ***4. Linking Learning Outputs to Learning Processes – Constructing the Psycho-Biographical Narrative***

Having identified learning outcomes, patterns of attention, goals and values I then attempted to trace the learning process as it was manifested in the diaries and the second interviews. I took an example of a learning output – e.g. changed behaviour – leaving the organisation. I then traced every reference to this ‘learning domain’ in the interviews and diaries. As I traced the processes leading to the learning output, the narrative unfolded. I began to construct the psycho-biography from the relevant events, emotions, reactions and sensemaking mentioned by the diarist. This was done as an entirely separate exercise with no intention of tracing goals, values or attention patterns into the analysis. However, if I needed to make sense of a decision, a behaviour or a piece of sensemaking I could refer back to the list of values and goals and attention pattern I had already outlined at the beginning. If any of these items seemed to carry “explanatory force” (Runyan, 1982) then I could use them to help explore the psycho-dynamics of the learning. This is the part of the biographies that is highly interpretive and subjective. However, I used whenever I could the explanations and accounts of the learning process given to me by participants – so much of the analysis is based upon the insights of the learners themselves. In addition I have at all times used the words of the participant to support my argument, both during the learning event and subsequently in the second interview. This will help the reader reach their own conclusions and generate alternative hypotheses should they so wish. I have also more objective supportive evidence in terms of the attention patterns and in terms of contradictions in the text of the diaries and interviews, what

the participant actually does and also in the 360 feedback. At times I have also proposed three or four possible alternative explanations as to why a person learned in the way they did together with the explanation that I personally prefer. Finally, and perhaps most significantly, I showed the learning biography to four of the diarists after I had written them. Their feedback can be seen in Appendix 4. Whilst there is one comment about ‘over interpretation’ (which I accept has probably been a trap I have fallen into) they are largely supportive. Unfortunately I could not contact others to get further feedback on the accounts. Nevertheless, this helps to bring a higher degree of validity to the learning biographies.

The following excerpt shows how I constructed the underlying learning narrative that contributes to the eventual learning biography.

### **Constructing the Psycho-Biography of Rob Tyler**

#### ***The Learning Outcome***

From: Existing Schema, emotional orientation and behaviour (beginning of year):

*‘I do not want to put effort into trying to work with colleagues that I do not get on with.’ (my words, supported by the following statements)*

“I find, every now and then, probably once a year there’s one person who I catastrophically can’t work with. If it’s a customer then I just have to manage it, if it’s a colleague I don’t put the effort into managing it. I just decide for some reason, I’ve never thought of the reason, but I decide it’s low priority” (Rob Tyler, i/v 1)

“It was very similar to the story you were telling of the colleague you work with when you went away, you were very different people and you had to work at it. Well I’m willing to work at it with customers I find it less easy to work at it with colleagues, I just find it easier to play “don’t try just recognise it and give up or something” (Rob Tyler, i/v 1)

To: Changed schema, emotional orientation and behaviour (end of the year):

*greater tolerance, understanding of difficult colleagues and changed behaviour towards them.*

**KAREN** If you sort of look back over the last year, would you say that you’ve learnt anything in particular, have you got any new insight,



new perspective, new feelings?

**ROB** I suppose the main thing I've learnt is a fairly simple thing. I don't know how to put it into words, I mean we are all different, and there are types of people, I think I've learnt that because, if I look back, virtually every training course I've been on, every management training course, we've done Myers—Briggs or we've done this and we've done that, I looked down on them and at the time and I think OK, and afterwards I've not used it at all, not used it at all, not even in my thinking. But over the last year, **it's figured a lot more in my thinking** about if we're going to put a team together for this, what sort of team do we want, how do we put the best team together, and if things aren't working, the first thing I've gone to is you know, why isn't it working, what can we learn from this but also, let's look at the people and what sort of people have we got involved in this and would we expect them to work together so I am in an amateurish way using it (Rob Tyler, i/v 2)

360 Feedback: "He's always worked well with people and groups and has if anything got better at that." (Colleague of Rob Tyler, end of the year feedback)

### *Learning Process – The Psycho-Biographical Narrative*

This is where I construct the narrative of how Rob changed from the beginning of the year to the end of the year, in this case changing his schema, emotional orientation and behaviour towards difficult colleagues.

1. First of all I asked Rob in the second interview what it was that led to the changes in his attitude towards difficult colleagues. The learner often tells his or her own story of their learning.

"And the feedback we got from the Myers-Briggs as a group, well that was good, but it was much better than in the past, in the past, all the Myers-Briggs stuff I've done is really one to one and we don't do it as a group, but it was really one to one and I think nobody really used in a group atmosphere, and all this business how the directors were sort of coming out, OK it's not science or anything like that, I'm sure there are directors that are different but when you start thinking about it, you know, why is that happening, oh yeah, you could see that that sort of profile or that sort of person, brings value to that post and sort of thinking that sort of thing. So the whole environment of thinking, trying to learn but also thinking about people and types." (Rob Tyler, i/v 2)

In the same interview he told me of a formative experience that helped changed his attitude and behaviour towards difficult colleagues: he suddenly realised that he had picked up an unwarranted prejudice against a colleague:

“It was and it happened very early on so it was good for me. **And that changed me completely**, strange, really strange, because I don’t know where I picked up this issue (his prejudice) with ST, obviously by something I picked up from other people because I don’t interact with him. I was on a training course with him and ....I quite liked ST and yet we came to the same business years later, and I had this bias and I couldn’t tell you where I got it, I mean I obviously picked it up from other people and things weren’t going well with the interaction with Steve, and it exactly matched the bias and it just, it was just reinforced” (Rob Tyler, i/v 2)

“Before I had been to see him I thought he was a lazy bastard and that’s why it wasn’t working and afterwards I thought about what can I learn about this, I was thinking, it must be a very lonely existence being a one person team here, because the rest of his team are, and I looked at him much more sympathetically and my interaction with him then was much better, much better working relationship I had with him” (Rob Tyler, i/v 2)

From the second interview I can glean that Rob changed his attitude, behaviour and emotional orientation towards his colleague, ST in quite a profound way. This seems to have been a formative influence on him, making him realise that his attitudes towards difficult colleagues were often prejudiced.

2. At this point I try to fill in the gaps in the story. I do this by asking certain questions. Most importantly, I problematise a number of issues:

- Why did Rob responded to the Myers Briggs session in this way. It is clear from his statement that he had encountered Myers Briggs before but had ignored it. Why did he pay attention to it this time?
- How did Rob suddenly gain this insight regarding his prejudice against ST?

These are profoundly important questions. For example, the two senior managers in the study both had access to BEM. One totally ignored it, the other made it a central priority – why? I do not take it for granted that individuals respond to learning triggers or catalysts in the way they do (although for them it often appears inevitable). In Rob’s case I was aware that the Myers Briggs session related to concerns that he had indicated were central to his main goals and needs. This is when I can refer back

to the sections on goals, needs and values. In Rob's case, I believe he paid attention to the Myers Briggs session because:

- it related to his concern and frustration around the lack of strategic direction from the senior team. The Myers Briggs session raised this issue and to a certain extent explained it;
- it related to a difficulty he was having with his boss which was also causing him a lot of frustration and concern.

This is my interpretation but I can provide supporting evidence:

“Probably that's one of the most frustrating things for me, is the sort of things I want to do and the sort of things you want to do in product development, growth, marketing and to some extent sales, they all need some sort of overall strategy for the business...(and) they are not giving strategic direction to the business and to some extent collectively they are fooling themselves that they're doing new things by grabbing on to some of the little innovative things that maybe come out of our team” (Rob Tyler, i/v 1).

“A (his boss) and I are both very different and I can't handle it, I can't handle that, so I can't work with A. It's a bit better than it was, I don't argue with A anymore, I used to have the most dreadful arguments, but now I recognise there are some things that I'll never get through with him, and there are some things I can but I do it by not letting him know. That's no way to work.” (Rob Tyler, i/v 1).

It was shortly after this that Rob became sensitised to the usefulness of understanding different people's personality profiles and his own prejudice. He starts to use a different schema to understand the world. Whilst sensitised to the need to understand difficult colleagues, he 'caught himself' dismissing a colleague as a “lazy bastard” (Rob Tyler, interview 2) and challenged himself. Having challenged himself he discovered just how wrong he had been. This provoked both shock and surprise and an insight into his own biased construal processes.

I then refer to any points in the diary that can provide further insights into this learning process. Rob's first diary includes the reference to ST:

“Reflected on how my behaviour towards R (supportive, understanding) is different to my behaviour to ST. Both are product champions - but I’m fairly negative with ST. Because I think him lazy? (Rob Tyler, April diary)

In June there are a number of different references to the need to understand people at work:

“At lunch with a staff member I’m mentoring, I found out that one of her concerns was to understand why she wasn’t chosen for a training opportunity. She assumed it was because she was too busy to attend – she was right – but no-one had told her that. So the lack of a simple bit of communication had generated a fair bit of uncertainty in someone’s mind about “the hidden motives behind an innocent decision””. (Rob Tyler, June diary)

“Talking to one of the DM’s I found he had a very different view of what motivates staff. Even when we got down to individual names we had almost opposite views of what really motivates! So I’ll need to think about a range of motivators in the future.” (Rob Tyler, June diary)

“I need to continually check that people I interact with are hearing what I want to say – and vice versa” (Rob Tyler, June diary)

In September, Rob refers to using the Myers Briggs to improve his communication with his boss:

“One action from the workshop is on A and myself. We spend 3 hours progressing the action. For once we work tolerably together. Probably because I decided to be amenable to A’s Myers Briggs style and suppress mine. It made for less friction but the sum output was less than our sum capabilities” (Rob Tyler, September diary)

There are other examples that show how Rob is ‘reflecting’ more actively and thinking more critically about his relationships with his colleagues. Often he mentions the Myers Briggs session or wonders about the team dynamics and personality profiles of the people he is interacting with. It seems clear from the diaries that Rob is reflecting more about his relationships with his work colleagues. This seems primarily stimulated by his Myers Briggs session which he quickly applies to a colleague with astonishing results. In other words, driven by key goals and needs, he discovered a schema that seemed to have great use and application. Having realised its power he actively applied it to his situation and discovered new insights about himself and others.

Now whilst some of this is speculation much of it is supported or described by the learner him or herself. By identifying the learning outputs and asking the learner about the processes and then tracking those processes through the diaries we can construct the story or the ‘psycho-biography’ of the learning.

However, we used Rob’s example here because it was particularly clear and simple. Other psycho-biographies may contain a greater element of speculation on my part. Nevertheless, the speculation is always supported by quotes from the interviews, diaries or 360 feedback.

#### **4.2.viii)                      *The Final Theory***

By approaching the 21 learning biographies in this manner, I was constantly refining the theory in the light of the individual stories. By the end of the process I had developed a theory that I felt comprised a powerful explanatory force for the wide range of learning I had encountered, addressed the question I had originally posed and fit all of Glaser’s criteria – fit, relevance, modifiability and it ‘worked’.

An overview of this theory is presented in chapter 6. It is then applied more specifically in Chapters 7 – 9 to show how people change their schemas, emotional orientations and their behaviour.

### **4.3    *The Sample***

At this point we should look at the background and nature of the sample of people who comprised my diarists. Two organisations participated in the study. One was an ex-public sector nuclear science establishment (Scientific Solutions) the other was a logistical company (Logical Logistics).

In both organisations I met the GM (LL) and the MD (SS) to explain the nature of the project. I indicated that I would be able to provide some general feedback as to attitudes to the change and how the changes were being interpreted by the participants

(ensuring individual confidentiality at the same time). I also offered general support to the managers in talking through their change initiatives should they so wish. I suggested that most participants would benefit from the one-to-one interviews (which were more like chats) and also promised to give people feedback on their Myers Briggs scores. As a result both organisations were happy to proceed.

I then issued an invitation to participate in the study outlining the benefits to the participants. I attracted a high degree of interest and over 50 people participated in the first part of the study (the Myers Briggs feedback days and the first interviews). However, when given the diaries over half the sample dropped out (I had anticipated this and was later thankful as I could not have handled that much data!). So I was left with 13 SS people and 8 LL people.

### *Scientific Solutions plc (SS)*

Scientific Solutions had been privatised only two years before I approached them. The organisation had been divided into 11 different businesses. I was working with the consultancy arm that comprised nuclear physicists and other scientists who audited the safety of the country's nuclear establishments. They also 'sold' their knowledge and expertise according to the needs of their customers – for example, they would advise Eastern European countries on the safety of their establishments and they would provide risk analysis reports for nuclear submarines for the Navy.

Scientific Solutions had been an unwieldy public sector organisation that was run along the lines of the civil service. They were situated on large 'science parks' which were miniature towns in some cases with huts and buildings spread out over a wide area all designated by letters and numbers (building SY120 etc). From this base the Board were attempting to create a market led, thriving and profitable business. The main change that was being driven through the business at this point was the attempt to engender a more commercial, sales oriented culture focused upon generating higher profitability. The Chairman of the Main Board had promised City investors significant increases in profits and it was this promise that was driving the change throughout the business.

The consultancy side of Scientific Solutions then was attempting to encourage more selling, more focus on the bottom line and a greater emphasis on marketing. For people who had joined a governmental, civil service type organisation, this was a significant change.

However, the main problem as experienced by many of the scientists was not the increased focus on 'selling', it was more that senior management did not appear to be changing anything beyond an increased focus on cost cutting. This was causing widespread resentment and disillusionment.

I managed to recruit 13 people from Scientific Solutions altogether:

***Sandy Simmonds, 37***

The MD of Scientific Solutions. She rose up the managerial ladder after completing her PhD. She is married with no children.

***Charles King, 37***

A consultant with a young family. He also has a PhD.

***Kay Mendes, 34***

The Finance Director. She has come in from a commercial organisation. She has a degree and is a qualified accountant. She is not married and has no children.

***Alex Gray, 39***

Alex was my main sponsor for this project and I still keep in touch with her. She contacted me via an advert I placed in the AMED (Association for Management Education and Development) magazine. She qualified as a scientist but wanted to change her career and go into organisation development. During the study she was a member of the growth team responsible for encouraging new product development throughout the company. Married to John Gray and has no children.

***John Gray, 39***

Alex's husband, the operations director of SS. A scientist and senior manager in his first board position.

***Steve Black, 41***

Steve is a highly qualified and experienced scientist. He has a PhD and is a team leader. He has a young family.

***Rob Tyler, 52***

Rob is a scientist who moved into management some years ago. He is looking forward to retiring. He is team leader responsible for new product development and the growth process, reporting to the board. He is married with a grown up family. Alex reports to him.

***Paul Richards, 40***

Paul is a scientist and consultant working on safety. He has been in his position for a number of years. He is currently quite disillusioned with his career. He is single with no children.

***Tim Howes, 41***

Tim is a scientist and team leader. He is energetic and very enthusiastic about selling. He is married with no children.

***Jim Barnes, 39***

Jim is a scientist and consultant with a young family.

***Carys Sale (late 20's – estimate)***

Carys has just completed her PhD and this is her first job since leaving university. She is single with no children.

***Mat Steele, 49***

Mat is the team leader for the fire and safety team. He does not have a scientific background but is more technical (engineering). He is married with a grown up family.

***Sally Peters, 41***

Sally is a scientist, and a consultant working on safety, married with no children.



What is noticeable about this sample are the high educational levels which (since we are exploring learning) could have a significant effect on the outcome. The ages range from late 20's to 52 with the average most being around 43. Levels of seniority range from consultant to three Board members, including the MD. There are four women in the sample and seven men.

### ***Logical Logistics plc (LL)***

Logical Logistics is almost opposite to Scientific Solutions in every way. It is a logistics company that contracts to undertake the logistics operations for large retail clients. It has a wide range of clients and the depot in the study works for Tesco. This means its sole client is Tesco and it is run almost as an adjunct to Tesco. The general manager is integrated into the Tesco management team as well as reporting to his own Board of Logical Logistics. The implications of this are that the depot tends to take on the culture of the client rather than that of Logical Logistics.

The nature of the logistics business is essentially warehousing and transportation attracting a large pool of unskilled and semi-skilled labour. It is predominantly a male culture with very few women; the women who work there tend to be based in the offices though there are one or two in the warehouse itself. The culture of Logical Logistics is dictatorial and power based, highly influenced by what Jim Eddy, the General Manager of the depot, calls the 'good boy' syndrome (nepotism, favouritism and deference).

Jim Eddy is in the middle of implementing is a profound change in the cultural values driving the depot. This is supported and partly driven by Tesco, the client. Jim is trying to change from a dictatorial management culture to a participative, open, democratic and meritocratic culture.

Most of the people working for Logical Logistics have few if any educational qualifications. My sample includes eight people who perhaps are more qualified than the norm in LL:

### ***Jim Eddy, 47***

Jim is the General Manager of the depot. He is a qualified accountant although he did not go to university. He has a grown up family. This is his first post as a GM and the post is a result of a recent choice to move from a professional specialism to more general management.

***Bill Fineman, 45***

Bill Fineman left school at 16 to become a lorry driver. At the age of 40 he moved into his first management position and since then decided to go into HR. He is on the verge of completing his professional HR qualifications and is currently HR manager at the depot on the general management team. He has a grown up family.

***Ann Smart, 35***

Ann started with Logical Logistics as a 'temp' in the accounts department. She gradually rose to her current position of Finance manager on the general management team. She is in the middle of taking her accountancy exams. She is divorced with teenage children.

***Ben Baker, 37***

Ben is an engineer. He is site manager at the depot on the general management team. He is married with a family.

***Peter Foot, 44***

Peter retired from the police force on grounds of health. He is currently in his first management position with Logical Logistics. He has a grown up family.

***Will Payne, 26***

Will left school at 18 and joined Logical Logistics with the intention of going into management. After a rapid rise through management is now Systems manager on the general management team. He is single with no children.

***Dan Smith, 31***

Dan is in his first management position in Logical Logistics. He is an enthusiastic supporter of Jim's new culture change and is keen to prove himself. He has a young family and one of his young boys is quite ill with a stomach problem.

*Ian Brown, 32*

Ian is an experiment for Logical Logistics. He is a graduate trainee – the first one they have had. Having said that he is in his early 30's having come out of the Army only recently. He is in his first management position on the night shift. He is single with no family.

The main contrasts with the SS sample is that here the educational levels are far lower. The average age is 37 and there is only one woman. The levels of seniority range from junior management to the GM and his team.

Overall the sample is highly diverse comprising wide variations in educational levels, levels of responsibility, age and life experience.

## **Chapter Five: Jim Eddy's Learning Biography**

### **5.1 Introduction**

Each learning biography consists of between 30 and 70 pages. To include every biography in this section would have comprised over 1000 pages. As a result, it was felt that the full biographies could be attached in an appendix.

However, one example of the full learning biography has been included here to demonstrate the full analysis that lies behind the summaries. I chose the biography of the GM of LL as I became quite close to Jim and hence the analysis is slightly more in-depth. Jim also learns a lot over the year and hence his biography provides a variety of learning examples and also includes a section on what he did not learn.

It should be noted that I often use the same quotation on a number of occasions to support different points. Hence certain quotations may recur. This is inevitable as a statement may be used for a number of purposes. We have seen already how difficult it is to separate emotions, cognitions and values. Hence the same statement may be used to illustrate how someone feels, what they believe and their personal value set. We have also seen how the same schema may be activated in a variety of contexts but fulfilling different functions. For example, a schema may be used to justify an action on one occasion and on another occasion may be used as a statement of personal values and on yet another occasion may be used to describe an individual that is admired. As a result certain statements will be used more than once in the learning biography to support different points.

## 5.2 *Learning Biography - Jim Eddy*

### **Contents**

- 5.2.i Learning Outcomes
- 5.2.ii Values and Goals
- 5.2.iii Attention
- 5.2.iv The Learning Process
- 5.2.v What Jim Did Not Learn
- 5.2.vi Summary

## **5.2.i            Learning Outcomes**

This section shows what the diarist learned over the year. A number of techniques have been used to demonstrate learning. Sometimes quotations from the beginning and end of the year are compared and contrasted showing the changes that have resulted. On other occasions the diarist simply describes his or her learning in the second interview looking back over the year. In addition we have used 360 feedback or comments from colleagues, bosses and direct reports to demonstrate change.

### **a.        Developing A Vision For The Business**

#### **New Schema regarding business processes**

“I think the interesting bit for me, because it, I don’t know why, it just interests me, is actually then what does that mean to managers and to management organisational structure? And that did lead me to read Michael Hammer....Again that just made it clear, it allowed me to draw my models of what I thought process management was about and share with that B and C and the team, and to give them an understanding of what I was thinking and for them then to help me develop it further, which is in fact what we did” (i/v 2)

“I think how we view the business has changed, and it’s all wrapped up, because I don’t think you can actually put structure aside here, but the fact now that we look at processes rather than function as we used to” (i/v 2)

#### **New Behaviours**

“And we’ve got a couple of experiments going on in terms of the communication group, mostly shop floor people about how they want to be communicated with.” (i/v 2)

“the proposal was like no proposal that LL had ever done before, it was all about the people management, the BEM process management, all that kind of stuff, very much at the forefront, with really, hardly anything about the numbers, which is normally our proposals are all numbers, and by the way we’ll manage the people, very, very different.” (i/v 2)

“we talk about things in a different way, we use a different language to the one that we used 12, 15 months ago, and it is about process and we do understand that we’ve got to think in that way now, so that’s probably been the biggest change” (i/v 2)

#### **Changed Emotional Orientation to Role and Business**

“the change has not filled everybody on site with the same sort of excitement, if that’s the right word, that it has for me” (i/v 2)

## **b. Learning How to Implement Change By Influencing Upwards.**

### **New Schema of How to Influence; Changed Schema of Senior Managers**

At the beginning of the year Jim felt that politics seemed to play a great role in determining who got on the organisation. The fact that the people in the hierarchy above him seemed to lack credibility, intelligence and talent always depressed him:

In discussions, Jim would refer to many of these senior managers as “dinosaurs” or, with heavy irony, as his “elders and betters”.

By the end of the year however he is less concerned about credibility and more concerned about their politics:

“I do struggle with some of these people that are supposedly brighter and more influence and all that and just can’t seem to grasp it, but then that’s all about the politics and the status things and all the other rubbish, every company has somewhere. So I understand it but it doesn’t make it any easier to be patient.” (i/v 2)

In line with this changed schema around politics he develops a new schema based upon the power paradigm about how to influence them – this is less about logical persuasion and much more about ‘guerilla warfare’:

**JIM** I think that it feels like I’m into guerrilla warfare and some of what I do, talking to other GM’s and having people here, is about planting seeds so that the pressure builds. I think the people at the top, at the moment, have no conception about things like Balanced Scorecard, managing the business in that balanced way, they haven’t got any concept that they may actually have to change as well....but that’s what I mean about having these people here, there’s pressure building from below now, and we’ve got one or two people at the top who are interested as well, so they’re going to end up as the jam in the sandwich at some stage, it just won’t be in my time scale, it’ll be in somebody else’s time scale, but that’s fine.

### **New and Changed Behaviour and Changed Emotional Orientation**

Jim’s new and changed behaviours in this area are related to his need to influence people around his new vision - especially his seniors and peers. He influences and senses the effectiveness of his influence:

“By that time I’d done this presentation to the European Conference which was a bit nerve wracking in the sense that it was the first time I’ve stood up in front of 130 people” (i/v 2)

“the problem then’s about who you can win over. And I would hope at some stage that the people that are converted or I am converting, will start getting into positions of power where they can actually influence, more than they can currently.” (i/v 2)

“think that it feels like I’m into guerrilla warfare and some of what I do, talking to other GM’s and having people here, is about planting seeds so that the pressure builds” (i/v 2)

At the same time however, his greater self confidence and conviction that he is right, generates a greater impatience with regards to the “dinosaurs” at senior levels that block him:

**“KAREN** I don’t know if I’ve asked you this before. Have you noticed yourself changing at all?

**JIM** Yes I think I have changed. I think the change has been odd in some ways because in some things I’ve got more patient and in other things I’ve got more impatient, because I never had a great deal of patience. I get impatient with my elders and betters, seems perfectly obvious to me, but it obviously isn’t to them. So I find that very frustrating, but then you knew that already really didn’t you?



## c. Learning How to Implement Change Amongst Direct Reports

### Changed Schema and Changed Emotional Orientation

Jim realises that much of the interpersonal strife that resulted from the new structure could have been avoided, had he managed people and their expectations differently. He has also grown in that he realises the importance and power of empathy which has given him a greater tolerance and patience for people caught up in the change.

“I think because when we started I didn’t understand all the implications of what we were doing and it didn’t, I suppose because it probably wouldn’t have bothered me, but I didn’t understand that sort of, being part of what used to be called the senior management team, but not contributing, and now being part of a process only group that does contribute felt like a loss of status, and I hadn’t quite figured that out, maybe I should of, but I hadn’t. And I think part of that’s because it probably wouldn’t have bothered me personally, it obviously did bother a number of people here.” (i/v 2)

“**KAREN** And so what you’ve learnt from that then is to simply be more patient rather than to do things differently?”

**JIM** Yeah, I think it’s about patience, I think it’s about being what’s that lovely word, it’s about empathy, that’s what it’s about. I’d taken it very much, I’d looked at it simply by how I would feel, there’s no question about that, what would that mean to me if it was happening to me, well it wouldn’t bother me because I could see that I’ve actually got potentially a more interesting role, where I can add more value, and that’s probably how I look at jobs, I don’t know. But I could have rationalised that very very quickly, and I don’t think, well I didn’t realise that other people wouldn’t rationalise it in the same way that I could, with empathy, lack of.” (i/v 2)

## **5.2.ii Values and Goals**

When writing up the learning biography I found that I often referred to the diarist's values when trying to make sense of their learning. This section provides support for what I claim to be the diarist's value set.

### ***Values***

#### **1. *Fairness and Openness***

"I think you've got to be as open and honest as you can with them, you've got to be fair, I'd like to think that I treat people in the way I would want to be treated and treat them as human beings as opposed to cannon fodder" (i/v 1)

"that's what we try and do as a management team, move away from the good boy syndrome as well, which is a problem" (i/v 1)

"he was an extremely professional manager, scrupulous in the way he dealt with people" (i/v 1)

"I just felt that the treatment that Dennis had had was so bad that I couldn't work for a company that did that and....I started looking around" (i/v 1)

"I think that the politics in the past have been very destructive and I haven't got a great deal of time for those kind of politics" (i/v 1)

#### **2. *Involvement***

"my style is to involve people and take advice from the group and then make the decision" (i/v 1)

"we are trying to move it, into much more involvement and getting people's ideas and making them feel valued for a contribution" (i/v 2)

#### **3. *Developing People***

"Why would I see it as a success? Because I'd moved those people forward so that they were capable of doing that job....I enjoy seeing people getting on who deserve to get on." (i/v 1)

"I think that every manager has a responsibility to develop the people that work for him" (i/v 1)

"I like developing people and the sort of ongoing development centre rather than doing training courses" (i/v 2)

#### **4. *Integrity - living the values, walking the talk***

"I have a set of values which I happen to believe that in terms of people management are, I think, largely, though not entirely espoused within the I.I.P (Investors in

People) and I felt that rather than just talking the talk, you've got to walk the talk as well" (i/v 1)

"I like her very much, good member of the team, understands the values, lives the values" (i/v 1)

"he lives the values, understands what we are trying to do" (i/v 1)

"he will never be able to fully embrace the values that we are trying to live here now....you would never put him back in charge of a shift for example" (i/v 1)

"are we simply trying to get a quality award on the wall because it looks good, and not because it's what we believe in, because it's the right way to manage a company in the year 2000 and so that worries me a little" (i/v 2)

### *Logic and Intelligence*

Jim values intelligence in others and tends to rely greatly on influencing people through logic. He tends to be critical of people whose intelligence does not match their role in the hierarchy (his senior management); he does value people who demonstrate high intelligence. He uses these words, together with 'logic' consistently in his evaluation of people:

"I am still concerned that they do not fully understand all the implications" (June)

"I am in danger of getting really upset with L because he does not seem to understand me, after 5 years or what is happening around him in terms of the company HR/Change strategy" (March)

"He is a strategic thinker who understands what the BEM can do for the company....at last" (July)

"people are beginning to understand at a superficial level at least what this may mean for the Depot, individuals and structure." (August)

"L is coming on board more and more as his understanding increases" (September)

"No-one it seems is arguing with the logic of what I've presented and I'm hopeful that Richard will see the sense in it " (September)

"I mean we're winning them, they understand why, none of them can argue about the logic, all of them understand why we're doing what we're doing" (i/v 2)

“let’s start with C, C has embraced the idea of processes very early on, he understood it immediately because he’s got the intellectual capacity to understand it immediately” (i/v 2)

“An ideas man. Very quick witted, very intelligent” (i/v 2)

“Great analytical strength...he’s got that kind of mind that can take 3, 4, 5 different pieces of information and understand what the links are, so excellent at that...Understands everything we’re trying to do and understands the business backwards” (i/v 2)

## Goals

### 1. Establish a professional managerial culture (by implementing his values)

“I have a set of values which I happen to believe that in terms of people management are, I think, largely though not entirely, espoused within I.I.P. and I felt that rather than just talking the talk, you’ve got to walk the talk as well and I think we’re doing more and more of that” (i/v 1)

“one things I’ve been able to do is to bring more people on board, not just saying it but doing it in terms of changing the culture and moving it forward” (i/v 1)

“I talked to all the managers and they did presentations about what they were doing in the department and I responded to that by doing a presentation back to the management team, which was about the styles and values - on my styles and values and what I expected from the team and having put the framework in place you then make sure that you operate within it yourself and you make sure people operate within what is acceptable to you” (i/v 1)

Jim is prepared to move people who do not have the same values. Regarding his senior management team he says:

Jim “we haven’t quite reached the thoroughbred stage but I think we’re getting there

Karen what do you need to change to reach the thoroughbred stage?

Jim in reality probably two of the personalities that sit on the senior management team” (i/v 1)

### 2. Develop the depot and the people within it in order to help gain employment at the new Depot

“what I would like to do is to actually have people prepared to move across to the new depot and if the entire management team could move over that would be wonderful and I suppose, in one sense, that might be me feeling as if I owe people more than I owe the depot, it’s about maintaining people in work I think and I would want to get Logical Logistics Ltd to get the new depot but the reality is, if it were

somebody else, another contractor or T if they came to me and said, ‘you know we are looking for good managers’ then I could actually see that as a success as well.” (i/v 1)

### 3. “Put (the depot) on the Map”

At some stage, either before or at the beginning of the diary period, Jim sets himself the goal of putting the depot on the map:

“My decision to put (the depot) on the map has worked” (July)

It was never quite clear when Jim made this decision but it was made consciously with his team:

“one of the early decisions that I made with the then team, was that we would sell (the depot) to the outside world” (i/v 2)

There is a further aspect to this objective that Jim never makes quite clear. Could it be that Jim’s decision to put the depot on the map, (and change people’s perception of the depot) stems from a personal desire to put himself on the map and change people’s perceptions of him? What are the clues? Jim indicates that some people in the business regard him as a person with no operational experience, just an accountant:

“Well I actually use it to my advantage, because I can ask stupid questions when I’m only an accountant can’t I, whereas, as a general manager, I’m supposed to know everything, so you can actually use that I think. I think it’s a little annoying sometimes because people don’t realise that you do understand what’s going on but I think you can actually use it to advantage and I think I probably have done over time” (i/v 1)

In interview two he reviews this reflecting on how he is now viewed within the business:

“then yeah Jim’s all right as a general manager” (i/v 2)

Jim is keen to change people’s perceptions of him as an accountant; he wants to be seen not only as a General Manager but a good General Manager. He wants not only to be seen as a good General Manager but as a General Manager who stands for a set of values that work:

“what would be really nice in my own personal satisfaction, is actually to have won what is a major site, a major contract for LL and actually with my principles, that will be really very pleasing” (i/v 2)

So there is more of Jim’s personal aspirations and self esteem in this goal than at first appears.

### 5.2.iii Attention over the Year

This section shows what the diarist paid attention to over the year. Firstly, I recorded the events that each diarist wrote about. I then recorded how the diarist made sense of that event – i.e. what he or she was attending to within that event. I logged this on a table and then simply counted what subjects occurred most frequently in the diaries over the year.

Month	Event	How the diarist makes sense of the event – what s/he pays attention to within the event.		
Mar	<i>appraisal</i>	boss – Less	TH - goals	infl boss
		my pers dev		
	<i>mgr's dismissal</i>	feelings	mgr	my perf – hearings
	<i>strategic objectives</i>	Team	working well	outcome – good objectives
		input from all		
	<i>Tesco GM mtg</i>	mtg v quiet	cust unhappy	change
		cust culture	consultants exercise useful	will try out
	<i>Process mgt</i>	Tibb board attitude	feelings	structure
		goal – und more	reward and grading	
		<i>summary</i>	activity levels	progress
		boss	boss und of JE	boss und of HR/change strategy
Apr	<i>charity involvement</i>	intro prof approach	older trustees	influencing trustees
	<i>bonus discussions</i>	protecting boss from himself	maintain snr mgt credibility	major challenge
		snr mgt out of touch with Strood	CG	
	<i>new Tesco regional mtgs</i>	first mtg – new team	atmosphere	feelings
		uncertainty	new leader	
	<i>wage negs</i>	stewards selfish	circumvent unions	GM question time
	<i>summary</i>	too much happening	no thought	danger lose key issues
		noise - activity	how to avoid	
May	<i>Henley Tesco dist</i>	new structure	perception of us	PC – arrogant (cust)
		cust culture	our culture	BEM – goal
	<i>AM pres (snr mgr)</i>	feelings	good pres	whole team
		boss -	chgd perceptions of Strood	all achieved objectives
		feelings		
	<i>dr appraisal</i>	dr situation	dr changed enough?	dr beh and motiv
	<i>2<sup>nd</sup> reg mtg</i>	better	2 high perf team days	
	<i>sedac</i>	dr – beh and motiv	sedac exposing candidates	my perf
	<i>tesco dp team</i>	feedback	ppl and procedures OK	processes not
		feelings	BEM outputs	
	<i>tesco town mtg</i>	PC (tesco cust)	pres style	audience response
		good things said re Strood		
	<i>BEM</i>	TH and LM to support	BEM and how we manage	BEM and structure
	talk to BF C re how to manage	implications for other depts		

	<b>T+B GM mtg</b>	cred of snr mgt	feelings	
	<b>new director</b>	face value OK		
	<b>HPT days</b>	feelings	getting to know each other	str and weaknesses
		belbin – team vs personal		
	<b>tesco tbg mtg</b>	mtg at highest levels Tesco and Tibb	feelings	tackled T and boss
		present to board		
	<b>summary</b>	feelings	so much going on	energy levels seems high
		despite snr mgt	optimistic	
jun	<b>bem</b>	pot for change	evidence	no one to ask
		roles and responsibilities	re-thinking structures	
	<b>tesco gm mtg</b>	PC	feelings re PC GMs and change	BEM – right
		keeps us ahead of game		
	<b>board pres</b>	pres – change mgt, bem etc	board sat up and took notice	feelings
		do not und implications		
	<b>EO</b>	equal opps	long way to go	how to implement
	<b>tesco gm's trg</b>	2 days trg	core skills to manage change	understand
		intro effective mtg mgt		
	<b>summary</b>	busy month	tesco , bem , day job	optimistic
		feelings	learning	board – capabilities and commitment
july	<b>best practice group</b>	board commitment	vs longer term view	my views
		board response	kick back	shallowness of board
	<b>bem self assessment</b>	feelings	understanding bem,	scoring
		tim	team	processes
		structure		
	<b>self ass review</b>	effective mtg mgt	review outcomes and processes	effective tool
	<b>UK board visit</b>	pres	board reaction	using strood as pilot
	<b>bem and uk board</b>	part of 3 man steering group	bem	graeme – strat thinker und bem
	<b>summary</b>	decision to put S on map worked	pres to snr mgt	power
		2 key groups	objectives	conscious objectives
		feelings		
Aug	<b>change briefings</b>	bem	change	pres to mgt team
		personally to ppl	well received	process mgt
		chg mgt	structure	ppls response
		feelings		
	<b>structure</b>	process mgt	structure	Bill and craig
		reactions	feelings	
	<b>summary</b>	feelings	process mgt	
Sept	<b>tesco gm mtg</b>	process	mgt structure	parallel to tesco
		prescriptive	impact on us	
	<b>structure</b>	snr mgt team	their response	seeing indivs
		competition A and W	feelings	convincing Les and Tim it's right

	<i>process course</i>	course process team for cont imp	our lead re process	learned
		behaviours	emotional intelligence	mapping process
		timing		
	<i>Les tim mtg</i>	feelings	commitment of Les	tim loves us
		influencing snr mgt	feelings	
	<i>summary</i>	feelings	Les and Tim	logic
		infl snr mgt	new way of mgt	ideally placed
Oct	<i>strood bem</i>	consultants	bem	structure
Mar		impressed	16 actions for bem	
	<i>consumer gm forum</i>	hosted gms	pres on structures	reactions
		understanding	winning the argument	
	<i>summary</i>	feelings	pace of change	feelings re work
Nov	<i>dinner th and sr</i>	change progr	bem action plan	positioning of HR
	<i>hr job evaluation</i>	politics	hr mgr und	grade for Bill
	<i>ditto</i>	grade decision	decision not logical	infl steve
		my beh		
	<i>ditto</i>	infl steve	grade achieved	enemy of steve
	<i>summary</i>	politics	not understanding	enemy of steve
		feelings		

**Numbers of mentions in the diaries of:**

**His Vision**

**BEM** 11  
**Change** 12  
**structure** 8  
**processes** 8  
**culture** 2

**Influencing Senior Managers**

**influencing senior mgt** 13  
**the board/senior mgt** 10  
**his boss** 10  
**TH** 8

**His Team**

**Senior management team** 7  
**His two closest colleagues** 4

**Customer** 11

**Self**

**My feelings** 26  
**my performance/behaviour** 5  
**meetings** 5  
**presentations** 6



#### **5.2.iv The Learning Process**

*This section is my analysis of how the diarist learned what he or she did over the year. This is the main body of the learning biography.*

Jim learns more than many of the diarists over the year. His learning is all-encompassing involving novelty and change, thinking and doing, schemas of the world and of the self. It also involves changes in emotional orientation with regards to himself, others and his relationship to the world around him. Much of his learning is driven by two forces: values and goals. The goals may be tacit and often only recognised for such once they are achieved. As a result his learning is complex, rich and dense.

We have three major threads and all of them are driven by Jim's determination to implement the new structure around the BEM and advertise what he is doing at the depot to the rest of the company. These threads comprise:

- i. developing a vision for the business
- ii. learning how to implement change by influencing upwards
- iii. learning how to implement change below him

We will try to explore these threads separately bearing in mind however that they are all inter-related.

## **1. Developing A Vision For The Business: New Schema, New Goal, Changed Emotional Orientation to Role & Business and New Behaviours**

At the beginning of the year, Jim had a clear idea of what he wanted to achieve, as we have already seen on the section on goals:

1. Develop his people so that they will be chosen to work at the new depot by whoever wins the contract. Jim states that he feels more loyalty to his people than he does to the depot.
2. Continue to embed his values into the culture of the depot.
3. Meet his business targets. He often refers to this as doing the “day job”. It is clear that he has to meet these targets but these are not the main focus of his attention:

“So, I mean that, the other success, measures of success I suppose obviously is making sure that we make the contribution that we are supposed to make, we don’t lose too much stock, we don’t treat people badly, all of those other things but I think the thing that gives me the greatest pleasure, as a general manager, is actually seeing people get on that deserve to get on.” (i/v 1)

What seems to be Jim’s main focus at this point then is his desire to consolidate the values in the business and to develop people, particularly his immediate direct reports.

There is no reference to the implementation the Business Excellence Model or BEM. The BEM is not referred to until May. After that point it is referred to on many occasions in all but two of the remaining months. It is clear then that it becomes the main goal:

we must make progress with BEM. (May)

This is definitely the way forward (May)

So what is it that makes Jim first attach such importance to the BEM? It is interesting that the other leader (the MD) in the study also had access to the same model but did not give any attention or energy to it whatsoever. It is not inevitable that a senior manager would simply look at a business model like this and take it on board with

such energy and commitment. So why does it appeal to Jim? There are probably a number of reasons:

1. Jim sees immediately that it is going to enable him to achieve some very important goals. The company is intending to open up a new, much larger depot in the area which would take over many of the functions of the current depot. Whilst at the beginning of the year he is non-committal in terms of his attitude to this, over the year he becomes more and more determined to win the contract for the new depot. BEM will help him to do this. Firstly, his client, Tesco, are implementing a similar system - this enables him to develop a rapport with the very client who is responsible for awarding the new contract. Secondly, it embodies Jim's values, providing a logical, business framework for the systematic implementation of them in all parts of the business. Hence Jim believes in it passionately. It will put his depot "on the map" and, concomitantly, will put Jim on the map too.

2. It appeals to Jim's personality. He is a perfectionist and strives to do the best job he possibly can:

"I think as an individual, I'm a bit of a perfectionist.... and I just knew that however good I felt I might be, that I could actually do things better and things sort of crop up don't they? And you read something and it just points you down a track, and you think, oh yeah, why didn't I ever think of that? And you start doing some research and some reading and talking to people about it and I think it is driven by my need to do the best possible job that I can all the time. I'm almost, I had inherent issues around continuous improvement I think, I just like to be good." (i/v 2)

He is also intellectually curious and given a model that promises a basis for improvement he will grapple with it and enjoy the challenge to his own thinking:

"And I mean we've had some trigger points with that question, I mean the issues around the business excellence model clarified my thinking, no question about that, stuff around Balanced Scorecard, which came before that, just makes you think about things and what's important and having thought about what's important, you then think about how you can achieve what's important and that changes your mind to how you want to do things, what's important to you." (i/v 2)

Jim is a logical thinker who appreciates an intellectual challenge. The one quality he appreciates in his direct reports is their understanding or their intellect. The one

quality that he criticises his senior management for is their lack of understanding of the issues. The model provides a method for achieving his goals in a logical framework that he can relate to.

Jim also enjoys the intellectual challenge, the learning and the excitement of change. He is always looking for something to move him forward:

“I think that’s something in me about my optimism, my own way of looking at things as an opportunity, not seeing it as, well I suppose I saw it as a challenge, but not seeing it as a problem challenge, but seeing it as an opportunity challenge, because I tend to do that with most things...I’m a bit of a born optimist in many ways and I always look for something that’s going to move me forward, or whatever I’m doing forward, so it wasn’t a case of looking at the Business Excellence model and saying, oh my god, I don’t understand that, it was a case of, I think I understand how this might work and that means I need to understand processes particularly, and as I say I don’t know what the driver for that is, except that I know that, for as long as I can remember, I’ve always approached things in that way.” (i/v 2)

So, having come across the model, unlike his counterpart in SS, Jim sees the potential it has for both achieving and enhancing his goals and values, relating to it also because it is presented in a format that appeals to his intellect, his curiosity and his logical style. There is a congruence here that enables an alignment to take place between Jim’s personal values, goals, style, vision and strategy. We therefore have a good grounding for learning – Jim has a vision and the determination to pursue it.

Having taken on board the BEM, Jim learns a lot through it. This is not simply a new schema he has taken on, it changes his existing schemas around structure, management roles and functions and how to understand his business as a whole (i.e. looking at the business in terms of processes as opposed to functions):

“The more I become involved with this idea/vehicle the more I realise that we have not yet understood all the potential for change that this model will deliver...I’m still contemplating what applying this model may do to roles and responsibilities, it really is making me re-think all I thought I knew about structures etc” (June)

“The other major learning for me was that the team and I had not understood processes and that we would need to revisit our Process Workshop and

therefore I will need to re-think my views on structure, it will still change but not in the ways I envisaged” (July)

It is as if, having committed himself to learning from the model and accepting the challenge it offers him, Jim is ready to open up his current construing and happy to change his existing schemas in line with the new model – this is done mainly via reflection. This is particularly the case as it supports Jim’s existing value set - this does not undergo change! We can also see how this learning is manifested in the profound change of language that is evident between the two interviews. In interview one he focuses on ‘values’ and does not mention the word ‘process/es’ (as in ‘process management’) at all. In interview two he mentions ‘process/es’ 20 times and does not mention values once.

<b>Word Count</b>	<b>Interview One No. of mentions by Jim</b>	<b>Interview Two No. of mentions by Jim</b>
Values	24	zero
Process/es	zero	20

Jim is aware of how his language has changed and he feels that this shift has taken place more widely within the business as well:

“we talk about things in a different way, we use a different language to the one that we used 12, 15 months ago, and it is about process and we do understand that we’ve got to think in that way now, so that’s probably been the biggest change” (i/v 2)

There are similar shifts in language use amongst the other members of the top team. It is almost as if Jim has given up on ‘values’ as being the core construct around which to organise a business and substituted process instead. The processes of learning that have contributed to this include:

***reading (declarative learning)***

My head hurts! I’ve been doing a lot of research and reading around process management particularly Michael Hammer’s book Beyond Re-engineering. (August)

***discussing (discursive learning)***

C, B and I must think about how we manage this (May)

TH facilitated the day which eventually turned into 2 days. What became clear was that we did not understand the relationship between evidence and the scoring mechanism and that the evidence collection process we used was comparatively a waste of time (July)

***analysing the data (reflection)***

“I’m still contemplating what applying this model may do to roles and responsibilities, it really is making me re-think all I thought I knew about structures” (June)

***imagining how future structures might look (imaginative learning)***

“I will need to re-think my views on structure, it will still change but not in the ways I envisaged” (July)

***emotional learning***

gaining excitement, energy and motivation through the imaginative processes:

“Still very optimistic and so on, amazed some days about the amount of learning that’s going on.” (June)

“A really good month ending on a high with L (his boss) and T. No-one it seems is arguing with the logic of what I’ve presented and I’m hopeful that R (Board member) will see the sense in it.” (September)

So whilst immersing himself in the model and changing his schemas around the business, it is simultaneously enthusing him by supporting his values and goals and changing his emotional orientation to both his job and his bosses.

By September, Jim has overcome his despair with his boss and become more optimistic. He is also more optimistic about his Board. The conviction he feels with regards to the model also grows with each month and it is this that helps him to crystallise a new goal of winning the new contract (as opposed simply to developing his people so that they can fill the slots).

When asked at the beginning of the year, about his for the future of the depot he replies as follows:

“Plans for the depot, we are under threat, as you may well know, that Tesco are building a new depot at T. My personal version of this is that (the current depot) will actually continue to exist, but in a much reduced form, and what I would like to do is to actually have people prepared to move across to the new depot and if the entire management team could move over that would be

wonderful and I suppose, in one sense, that might be me feeling as if I owe people more than I owe the depot, it's about maintaining people in work I think and I would want to get LL to get the new depot, but the reality is, if it were somebody else, another contractor or Tesco, if they came to me and said 'you know we are looking for good managers' then I could actually say 'yes, well I happen to have a handful here and I'm quite willing for you to take them' (i/v 1)

Here Jim does not mention any ambition for himself to win the new contract; he would like LL to get the contract, but does not necessarily see that as within his power to get and his main loyalty lies with the people, not the depot. This changes as he becomes more and more convinced about his vision and sees how this supports much of what Tesco is already doing. He senses that it is not only possible to win the new contract, not only would it fulfil his goal of putting the depot and himself on the map, it is his duty, as a proponent of these values, to try.

The alignment between goals, values, style, vision and strategy grows as he becomes more and more successful. This success contributes towards greater self esteem, a growing conviction that he can lead these ideas throughout the business and a determination to manoeuvre himself into positions where he can do this:

"I am now part of a 3 man steering group, Tim – UK Board, Graeme – Textiles Operations Director and me, guiding the efforts of a project team whose task is to provide an effective self-assessment method for LL UK."  
(July)

This has been achieved by the combination of having a goal and practical learning. It was also facilitated by a discussion we had on the nature of power (coaching). So again we see here the powerful alignment between Jim's goals, his values, his style and the model. The power of a vision seems in part based upon the notion of its 'rightness' (values and goals) and the sense of one's own inner power and abilities to make it happen (the BEM providing the tool accompanied by the growth in Jim's confidence as he scores a series of successes).

This leads to subtle changes in behaviour:

### ***Tesco/LL Meeting***

there is to be a meeting “at the highest levels” of our companies, there is major concern that our directors will not understand where Tesco are coming from or where we are in Tesco perceptions and where we are in terms of the site developments. I ended up tackling both L (his boss) and T on this issue and thankfully I’m going to be given a chance to present to the Board on these issues - did I say thankfully?

This is something that Jim has not done before - taken ownership of an issue raised at Board level and proactively attempted to influence the outcome. Partly this new behaviour will have been driven by the passionate commitment to his new goal partly, this came from a discussion that Jim and I had about the nature of power. We will look at this in the next section but the introduction of a new paradigm for Jim, enabled him to change his behaviour with regards to the senior levels within the organisation (goal led learning and coaching).

We have also seen how Jim’s behaviour is changed in the new language he adopts, very much influenced by his reading (declarative learning), his attendance on training courses and discussions with consultants.



**2. *Learning How to Implement Change By Influencing Upwards.  
New and Changed Schemas, New and Changed Behaviours and Changed  
Emotional Orientation***

When I first met Jim, he had a belief that he was not likely to progress much further within LL, primarily due to a certain distance he felt from the senior management. The culture at the top of LL was everything that Jim disliked - cliquy, driven by the “good boy” syndrome and staffed by people who did not seem to ‘understand’ complex business issues. He saw no-one he liked or respected. This is a common theme throughout the diaries:

“I am in danger of getting really upset with L because he does not seem to understand me, after 5 years, or what is happening around him in terms of the company HR/Change strategy” (March)

“Must take care in exposing C to L in this type of discussion i.e. “protect” L from himself - maintain LL senior management credibility. This is a major challenge as they seem determined to show how out of touch with (the depot) they are” (April)

“what I have said about credibility of senior management - well it was demonstrated in spades here. I’m depressed” (May)

“there is a major concern that our directors will not understand where Tesco are coming from or where we are in Tesco perceptions” (May)

“I’m not convinced about the capabilities of my board and their true ownership of BEM” (June)

“the board...are looking for a “fur coat no knickers” solution to certain issues rather than taking the harder longer term view. I expressed my views which the other GMs backed but it didn’t go down well. No doubt there will be some kick back somewhere and if there is then it will again confirm my views about the shallowness of the board” (July)

What ‘depresses’ Jim about the board is firstly their lack of understanding of the concepts and potential of the model and secondly their ‘ownership’ of the model. As Jim states later

“I still have some reservations about why we actually have a change programme and are we simply trying to get a quality award on the wall because it looks good, and not because it’s what we believe in, because it’s the right way to manage a company in the year 2000. And so that worries me

a little Because it's a bit like BS5750 or ISO 9000 or whatever it is...we did exactly this, simply said, it's all about competitive advantage, so go out and get it at any cost, you won't have to change anything, just write your procedures up and it will be fine and we all went out and won it and it did absolutely nothing for us." (i/v 2)

So it's about the directors' values as well as their understanding. As Jim puts it, there are people in the company who:

“pay lip service to it because some of their bosses are paying lip service to it and they are being told they've got to do it, but it's just a chore, it's extra, why would I want to manage like that, you know, I've always kicked people up in the air, and that works for me” (i/v 2)

So Jim assesses his board against his core values: humanism; intelligence and understanding; integrity (walking the talk) - and they are found wanting. This not only angers Jim, it 'depresses' him and this in some ways it makes him disengage with the task of changing them, as he does not feel the same optimism here as he feels in other parts of the business. In the first interview, Jim does not make one mention of his board or senior management. His attention is focused firmly and exclusively on the depot and his staff below him in the hierarchy.

It is only when he takes on a new goal, of implementing BEM (see above) that Jim is forced to interact with directors and the board (goal led learning). On the first occasion Jim finds out about a meeting that is to take place between Tesco senior management and LL senior management. The response to this news is immediate:

“there is to be a meeting “at the highest levels” of our companies, there is major concern that our directors will not understand where Tesco are coming from or where we are in Tesco perceptions and where we are in terms of the site developments. I ended up tackling both Les and Tim on this issue and thankfully I'm going to be given a chance to present to the Board on these issues - did I say thankfully? (May)

Here an event has grabbed Jim's attention because it has major relevance for his goals. He sees a danger, a possible obstacle to his achieving everything he believes in and this agitation stimulates a new behaviour - he requests the opportunity to present to the board. So, as well as goal led, this is a form of emotional learning - a threat to his goals pushes Jim to do something new - attempt to influence his board around his vision. At the end of the month he summarises his feelings:

“Strange as it may seem my energy levels seem particularly high and despite the efforts of my elders and betters I feel very optimistic about (the depot) and the progress we can make” (May)

This is the first reference to optimism with regards to his vision. It embodies a sense that Jim can make ‘progress’; a sense of power and influence (emotional learning). It is noticeable also that Jim’s approach to winning people around to his view very much focuses on ‘understanding’. Jim appears to have a tacit schema around influencing people: ‘if people understand the model, they will adopt it’. Jim’s approach to influencing both his bosses and his direct reports seems to be based upon this approach.

However at this stage his “elders and betters” are still seen as significant obstacles. This continues in June:

“Still very optimistic and so on, amazed some days about the amount of learning that’s going on. The only fly in the ointment is I’m not convinced about the capabilities of my board and their true ownership of BEM”

So Jim is progressing at depot level and he is progressing with Tesco but he does not yet feel he is progressing with the board. However, as a result of his presentation to the Consumer Group board a number of events follow on - a presentation to the UK board; appointment to a Best Practice Group; and appointment to a 3 man steering group where he meets a like-minded director:

“G really impresses me and is in the process of restoring my faith in the directors of the company. He is a strategic thinker who understands what the BEM can do for the company.....at last” (July).

Again, Jim focuses on how this person ‘understands’ the model as opposed to the other senior figures who neither understand nor ‘own’ it:

“I am still concerned that they do not fully understand all the implications”  
(July)

“L is coming on board more and more as his understanding increases”  
(September)

“No-one it seems is arguing with the logic of what I’ve presented and I’m hopeful that Richard will see the sense in it ” (September)

Jim's main, if not sole approach to influencing is logical persuasion. No other considerations, such as power, status, fear or politics come into play.

At this time, Jim and I also had a chat about power. He shared with me his pessimism around his Board and I introduced to him some ideas around power and influence. We also discussed strategies around building and maintaining power - seeing power as a fluid concept rather than a static one.

So we have a number of reinforcing events taking place:

- a new leadership behaviour stimulated by anxiety at a possible threat to his goals (emotional and goal led learning)
- opportunities to increase power and influence within the company, generating a new optimism and excitement (experiential, goal led and emotional learning)
- meeting a like-minded director, again generating new optimism (emotional learning)
- introductions of new schemas around power and influence. (coaching)

All of these events begin to generate a new schema for Jim:

“My decision to put (the depot) on the map has worked. I've done more presentations to GMs and Directors in the last 3 months than we've done in the last 3 years. Thank you (I think) for the chat we had around power, I'm now on 2 key groups although I'm not sure I consciously went looking for this but then you know my views on things that you wish for. It's been a real hard month in many ways but we are achieving our objectives even the ones I hadn't realised I'd set.” (July)

Jim has had a major shift in terms of his power and influence within the company and his emotional orientation to power. This has happened to him as he increasingly becomes more visible in selling his vision. In line with this increase in power, his schema of power has developed. The simple fact of having a vision makes things happen for Jim. As soon as he sets a goal it has its own logic - he has to present to people he would otherwise not have interacted with; in doing this he meets like-minded people and his optimism and support grows; he is given opportunities that

otherwise would not have arisen; and as a result of all this his schema around power, influence and people grows and develops. As this occurs, his emotional orientation towards power and the wielding of it also changed - instead of feeling powerless, pessimistic and depressed he feels powerful, optimistic and excited. All of this has come about through goal led, experiential, emotional, reflective learning and coaching.

In September Jim's schema of his boss changes:

“All that worry for nothing! L is coming on board more and more as his understanding increases and T just loves us to death. They now need to convince R our MD that we should be allowed to get on with it. I'm really happy with the presentation and the outcome”

Jim has concluded that the likelihood of his boss supporting him has increased. This Jim feels, has been as a result of his boss increasing his understanding, (still focusing on the logical approach) something that Jim felt pessimistic about in March.

In October, Jim makes another presentation after which he concludes:

“It's clear that there is a huge gulf in understanding the issues around Process management but it seems we are winning the argument”.

So in March he was pessimistic and depressed about the capabilities of his board, feeling that their lack of ability, understanding and ownership would block his desire to change the depot. By October Jim is feeling optimistic, not that he has changed their capabilities, but that he has increased their understanding of BEM and with that their support.

At this stage it is not quite clear how this new schema will manifest itself though it is clearly associated with positive emotions - optimism, excitement, amazement, confidence, hope - as opposed to the negative emotions of depression prior to May. By the second interview however, Jim has articulated the new schema very clearly:

“I think we're a bit into the 80/20 rule here, except it's probably 20/60/20, and I think there are GM's and Ops directors around and probably some of the MD's who are wholly committed to what we're doing in (the depot) and understand the implications, understand why it's important, and then there's

this enormous number of people, the 60% in the business who aren't really sure, and it might mean a lot more work, and it's definitely going to mean change and I'm not really sure I'm into change and there's all that stuff going on, and then there's the 20% at the bottom end that are the dinosaurs who, whilst they did become extinct, it did take 200 million years or something ridiculous ...and I think that, as I say, with the depot as it is and winning the new contract will move, move that 60% down to my end, so if we suddenly became 50% with 30% undecided and 20% at the rump then there's a future for the company, is how I feel about that." (i/v 2)

Here we have a much more fluid, realistic and empowering notion of how power operates in the company. Jim sees clearly that if he wishes to influence the direction of the company, firstly it is possible and secondly, there is a clear strategy for doing this:

“so it's getting out there, the message is going out there, I just think that it's all about critical mass isn't it? And I mean I wouldn't claim that it started with me because that probably wouldn't be right, but it started with a handful of us, three or four people, and then we started getting some outside influence, in terms of introducing things like BEM and that 3, 4, 5 people, became 6 or 8 people, and now we're probably at 20 people but we need to actually win the hearts and minds of another, however many it is, so we need the critical mass.” (i/v 2)

We have new notions operating within his power schema - “we need the critical mass”, “win the hearts and minds”, “getting some outside influence”. So this new schema seems to have coalesced around ‘how to gain power and influence within a company’. His notions of his board have not changed but his notion of how Jim can influence that board and influence the company as a whole have. In fact the new schema seems to have solidified his notions of his senior management; they have become the enemy and Jim is leading a guerrilla war. The following quotation is long but illustrates well how this paradigm has come together. The constructs associated with the paradigm are highlighted:

**“KAREN** I just wondered, and this is me throwing something in which I shouldn't really, but I just wondered whether your view of how easy or difficult it is to change the upper echelons has softened somewhat, as a result of your experience?

**JIM** No I don't think my views changed dramatically. I think that it feels like I'm into **guerrilla warfare** and some of what I do, talking to other GM's and having people here, is about planting seeds so that the **pressure builds**. I think the people at the top, at the moment, have no conception about things

like Balanced Scorecard, managing the business in that balanced way, they haven't got any concept that they may actually have to change as well... that's going to come as a shock, and some of that's about status, about the rewards that they get for doing whatever they're doing, and it'll all be very interesting when the penny starts dropping, but that's what I mean about having these people here, **there's pressure building from below** now, and **we've got one or two people at the top who are interested** as well, so they're going to end up as the jam in the sandwich at some stage, it just won't be in my time scale, it'll be in somebody else's time scale, but that's fine....And I would hope at some stage that the people that are **converted or I am converting**, will start getting into **positions of power** where they can actually influence, more than they can currently. I suppose there's some of that going on, and the other thing I didn't start with that intention by any means, but it does strike me the more that I see that in many ways that's the only way that it's going to be achieved. The hierarchy here is strange in many ways because there are people that started in the business when the business started at senior levels, and there is enormous loyalty from people like J to those people, and to a large degree those people are the dinosaurs in the business that don't want the change, **so it does feel like it's going to be guerrilla warfare rather than a pre-emptive strike.**" (i/v 2)

**"KAREN**      What do you see your role then as far as the rest of LL is concerned?

**JIM**            I suppose I see the role similar to the role that I see here, it's about being a **disciple** almost isn't it?" (i/v 2)

Here we have a new schema that seems to be based on notions of a crusade - guerrilla warfare, pre-emptive strikes, winning hearts and minds, gaining critical mass, conversions and disciples. The "dinosaurs" are the enemy and it seems as if it's going to be a long, drawn-out campaign that will not necessarily come to fruition whilst Jim is still with the company. Furthermore, Jim seems to understand better the motivations of the "dinosaurs":

"I do struggle with some of these people that are supposedly brighter and more influential and all that and just can't seem to grasp it, but then that's all about the politics and the status things and all the other rubbish" (i/v 2)

"I think the people at the top, at the moment, have no conception about things like Balanced Scorecard, managing the business in that balanced way, they haven't got any concept that they may actually have to change as well....and that's going to come as a shock, and some of that's about status, about the rewards that they get for doing whatever they're doing" (i/v 2)

It is almost as if Jim has realised that the resistance that these people present to him is not about lack of understanding or “credibility” (his favourite word at the beginning of the year); rather it is about self interest and politics, both things that Jim dislikes. It is almost as if Jim realises that he will never convince them because they have different values from him. So, by the end of the year, Jim is using the language of warfare and religion in his fervour to pursue his new goal - to embed his values and his people within LL as a whole. We do not know what led to this ‘hardening’ of attitude by Jim, as it is not recorded in his diaries but it may be something to do with his understanding of how people respond to change emotionally as well as rationally. This was brought about when he had to implement change in the depot (see next section). In the second interview he mentions how he has more patience for people below him as they have had to put up with a lot. However he has less patience for those higher in the hierarchy

“Yes I think I have changed. I think the change has been odd in some ways because in some things I’ve got more patient and in other things I’ve got more impatient, because I never had a great deal of patience. I get impatient with my elders and betters, seems perfectly obvious to me, but it obviously isn’t to them. So I find that very frustrating....but then that’s all about the politics and the status things and all the other rubbish, every company has somewhere. So I understand it but it doesn’t make it any easier to be patient.”

Jim is suggesting that he perhaps understands things more than he used to in terms of what is driving the senior managers’ behaviour, but because he does not value their values his understanding almost increases his impatience. Whilst he could sympathise with their lack of understanding as blocks to his vision, he cannot sympathise with fear and greed being blocks to his vision. It may be that this understanding reconfigures how he views these people emotionally - from people lacking in credibility to ‘the enemy’.

The main driver for this learning was Jim’s determination to pursue the BEM which we explored above. This was adopted primarily as it seemed a logical framework for change that embodied all of Jim’s values around treating people fairly, continuous improvement, and being the best. It was also in line with his goals of putting the depot on the map and working more closely with Tesco. This seemed to promote alignment - Jim’s values, goals, style, vision and strategy were all in alignment. This



generated a passionate commitment to the new vision that Jim pursued with energy and determination.

This emotional and goal driven learning led to new behaviours, new opportunities and the meeting of new people that gradually changed Jim's schema of what he could achieve in the organisation (discursive, trial and error and reflective learning). The introduction of some new constructs around power helped in this (coaching). These new experiences and insights around power helped Jim open up his construal processes and led to the growth of a new schema around power and how Jim might influence people in his company to adopt his vision. This coalesced into a schema embodying notions around guerrilla warfare and religious conversions. From a manager developing his people, Jim has become a disciple converting people to his vision of the future.

During this process Jim assesses his board according to two important constructs: understanding the vision and owning it. Whilst he manages to increase the understanding of his board, Jim does not really change his views of their ownership of it. What does change however is his view of their attitude to this lack of ownership (deliberate vs. due to a lack of understanding) and how to manage the opposition of the people in power in a more effective manner (coaching, reflective and practical learning). From trying to influence them logically, he moves into political alliance building and influencing.

We have seen how Jim develops over the year through a variety of learning processes:

- values: his values attract him to a new business model
- goal driven: the vision drives Jim's determination to overcome obstacles
- emotional : his passion and commitment grows and generates new behaviours
- discursive: his talks with others change his views of people in senior management positions
- practical: he tries out new behaviours and learns from the consequences

- reflective: he thinks about the dynamics of power and strategy, coming up with new notions that reflect his experience (disciple, conversions)
- declarative: he reads about power and influence and about BEM
- coaching: he receives some informal coaching
- vicarious he watches his clients in Tesco implementing change

Jim's experience in this arena reflects the power of the learning that can take place when someone is in alignment. The sheer determination to realise a vision that means so much to Jim, leads him in directions that he would not otherwise have had the opportunity to pursue. He takes on tasks and adopts behaviours that he might not otherwise have done. It also opens up his construing as he scours the environment for anything that will help him achieve his goal. As he says, having made a particular decision opens up opportunities that would not otherwise have taken place. Talking about the decision to put the depot "on the map" he claims:

"I suppose having made that decision, becoming a disciple for some of this stuff, just sort of naturally followed on." (i/v 2)

And when asked what drove him to make the decision in the first place we see the role that 'values' play in learning:

"I suppose internally knowing that what we were doing was right, I don't know it's, it just felt like it was the proper thing to do, you know, we do good stuff here, we get no credit for it, let's go out and sell ourselves, it was that kind of thing" (i/v 2)

The beginning of leadership!

### ***3. Learning How to Implement Change Amongst Direct Reports Changed Schema and Emotional Orientation***

When I first interviewed Jim he had been in place for one year. In that time he had implemented a major culture change from traditional theory X style management to theory Y management. In talking about how he did this we gain an insight into his views about how to implement culture change amongst his staff. This seems to consist of a number of steps:

- espouse and present the values
- role model them
- challenge people who do not adopt the values
- support people who want to adopt the values through mechanisms of training and promotion.

The first thing that Jim did on coming to the depot was to make a presentation on what he expected in terms of his values. This was then supported by his determination to role model those values and then to enforce them by both supporting and challenging his staff:

“I responded...by doing a presentation back to the management team, which was about style and values - on my style and values and what I expected from the team and having put the framework in place you then make sure that you operate within it yourself and you make sure people operate within what is acceptable to you, say, discipline is wrong then it's wrong and I change it, I don't back managers just because they happen to be managers” (i/v 1)

“I made it very clear that if you get it right I'll back you 100%, if you get it wrong, I'll be overturning your decisions and I'll be speaking to you separately because you cannot manage business where people do not understand where the boundaries are” (challenging) (i/v 1)

“I think it's about me being a role model to them and the other team managers being a role model to them” (role modelling) (i/v 1)

Speaking of two members of the senior management team who did not support Jim's values:

“they are probably doing something themselves to sort it out which may involve leaving the depot frankly” (challenge) (i/v 1)

Jim also implements training programmes and assessment centres to support his values.

So Jim's view of how to implement change is quite simple. It's about stating the expectations, role modelling them, supporting those who want to adopt them and challenging those who do not - which may lead to asking people to leave. There is a cold sort of logic to this approach to change. It is clear that for Jim, seeing his values supported in the business is more important than protecting the interests of one or two people who do not support the values. As the values are themselves around treating people fairly, openly and with respect, there is no love lost in Jim's books for those who treat people like "cannon fodder" as he puts it.

With the BEM Jim has a more complex change task on his hands. For one thing, it is difficult to understand the model intellectually. Secondly, the change involves not only culture but structure and roles. Thirdly, the people who lose out from the new structure will be people who are emotionally closer to Jim (they are loyal to him; he respects and likes them) and who share Jim's values. The people who lost out in Jim's first culture change were those who did not share Jim's values; there was little love lost between them and Jim is happy to see them leave. Emotionally, then Jim is protected against the consequences of his actions. The second time around this is not the case. He sees people whom he likes and respects suffer as a result of his change decisions. It is this, more than anything, that generates Jim's learning.

In the diaries, Jim makes scant reference to his direct reports and staff. The first few months are about Jim understanding the BEM. He makes one reference to including his two closest members of the management team in May:

"there will be changes in how we manage and it will impinge on structures. C, B and I must think about how we manage this, it is true that we have already taken out 1 layer in the warehouse but I wonder how much other departments realise what may be in store for them/the depot"

At this stage then, he already knows that a lot of changes will take place around structure and management in general. He wonders if the others know this - probably sensing that it may cause some difficulties for people. But this is the only mention of

his team or staff until August. From March to July, Jim's diary is dominated by references to the BEM, senior management and Tesco. Through the diaries, he mentions the managerial aspects of the model of change 45 times (BEM, processes, structure, strategy, culture and change itself). He mentions senior management and how to influence them 30 times. He mentions his own management team 6 times. One reference is incidental to the changes. Three references occur in August and September:

“B and I put together a presentation for the full management team on what the Senior Team had been up to around the BEM, the changes in Tesco, driven by Future, and a taste of what LL were undertaking. I delivered it personally to every member of the management team and my impression is/was that it was well received by them, the main message being that “Change is the only constant”. Process management raised its head in the Q & A sessions at the end of each briefing and people are beginning to understand at a superficial level at least what this may mean for the Depot, individuals and structure. I was pleased how these went and the reaction to the “heavy” message of change” (August)

So at this stage Jim feels his message was well received by the team and is pleased that they are beginning to understand the model. Again we have that emphasis on understanding; Jim makes no mention of how they might be feeling in the face of such uncertainty. He has already mentioned, with some sensitivity, that there will be a lot of change for everybody - but has not probed how they might be feeling about this. It seems as if the ‘psychological’ paradigm is not one that Jim readily uses.

In September the emotional consequences begin to make themselves apparent:

“I have now included the Senior Management Team in the discussions around process management and the likely impact. It's clear that they are not relaxed with this and they asked how it would affect them individually, I have responded by seeing individuals and discussing some options with them. There is a competition brewing between W and A for the Systems and Information Managers job. I now have to convince L and T that we have got it right, which for some reason I'm nervous about and I don't understand why it's worrying me.” (September)

Having decided on the new structure, Jim then included the senior management team in his discussions giving them in effect a *fait accompli*. For his two closest team

members this was not a problem as he had included them much earlier and they were both guaranteed a job on the now reduced SMT. Out of the original team of 7 there were now only to be 4 posts. With 3 already allocated, 1 post remained with 3 possible contenders. It is likely that Jim's description of the team as being "not relaxed" is an understatement - though whether he realises this or not is unclear! What is clear however is that his original description of his message being well received by the team was a little premature and betrayed some naivety with regards to his understanding of the emotional impact of his actions. His nervousness with regards to convincing his bosses seems to be a displacement from his nervousness with regards to how his own team is going to react to his proposed changes and how this reaction will affect the successful implementation of the model. What is noticeable at this point however is that he feels something and cannot quite understand the import or message behind the feeling. However, he knows the feeling is important and stays with it.

This is the last reference to the team in the diaries. What we get next is Jim's description of what he learned from what happened as he tried to push change through the SMT. My own experience of this is that it was a highly emotional time for everyone involved. Two people in particular were hurt in the process. One, a woman with quite low self esteem, was severely shaken by the process (see **Ann Smart's learning biography**). Another, a young man, was angry and bitter, losing his respect and loyalty to Jim (see **Will Payne's learning biography**). The point is not that what Jim did was either right or wrong, good or bad but rather that, without a strong psychological paradigm, he had not anticipated the emotional consequences of his actions. When these exploded, impacting on his vision for the depot, he begins to develop a new psychological schema that allows him to better anticipate and understand emotional reactions to change.

Let us look at how Jim describes his learning:

"I think because when we started I didn't understand all the implications of what we were doing and it didn't I suppose because it probably wouldn't have bothered me, but I didn't understand that sort of, being part of what used to be called the senior management team, but not contributing, and now being part of a process only group that does contribute **felt like a loss of status and I hadn't quite figured that out, maybe I should have but I hadn't**. And I

think part of that's because it probably wouldn't have bothered me personally, it obviously did bother a number of people here...its about patience, I think its about being what's that lovely word, its about **empathy**, that's what it's about. I'd taken it very much, I'd looked at it simply by how I would feel, there's no question about that" (i/v 2)

This is significant learning for Jim. He realises that he made a mistake and should have responded with more compassion. There is probably some defensiveness around here (his insistence that he would have reacted calmly to demotion that had a logical basis does not quite ring true!). There may be some self-serving bias going on in this sensemaking (I am not motivated by status only logic), but nevertheless he has managed to recognise that he made a mistake and needs to develop his empathy more. He has also recognised that people do not respond to situations in the manner that he would have expected. For Jim it is important that people see the logic of things. He assumes, typically for a Myers Briggs 'T' in business, that once people see the logic in things they will go along with them:

"I am still concerned that they do not fully understand all the implications"

(June)

"He is a strategic thinker who understands what the BEM can do for the company....at last" (July)

"people are beginning to understand at a superficial level at least what this may mean for the Depot, individuals and structure." (August)

"L is coming on board more and more as his understanding increases"

(September)

"No-one it seems is arguing with the logic of what I've presented and I'm hopeful that Richard will see the sense in it " (September)

"I mean we're winning them, they understand why, none of them can argue about the logic, all of them understand why we're doing what we're doing"

(i/v 2)

Nowhere in the diaries does Jim mention the politics of the situation (winners and losers), nor does he mention the emotional impact on people of losing their place on the senior management team or having to compete against colleagues for one job. Whilst Jim is beginning to develop a political paradigm it is still weak and his psychological paradigm is rarely used at all. People are rational creatures for Jim,

who act on their understanding of the world around them with. Emotions and drives follow logic and once the logic is understood, behaviour will align behind it.

After the implementation however, Jim has recognised the limitation of this paradigm. It did not help him predict and control the outcomes:

“I didn’t understand that sort of, being part of what used to be called the senior management team, but not contributing, and now being part of a process only group that does contribute felt like a loss of status and I hadn’t quite figured that out, maybe I should have but I hadn’t” (i/v 2)

Even here Jim sees the fault in terms of his lack of understanding, a lack of knowledge that he should have developed that prevented him from seeing the logic in the situation! He is also somewhat dismissive of his new paradigm:

“all of them understand why we’re doing what we’re doing, but there are all these other issues about, it feels as if I’ve been demoted and you don’t love me anymore, and all that stuff.” (i/v 2)

“All that stuff” is a bit of a nuisance because it is getting in the way of people’s understanding and acceptance of the change! Here we see the seeds of a new paradigm that is not wholly in tune with a preferred way of seeing the world. Emotions complicate logic and hence make paradigms based purely on logic weaker mechanisms for understanding the world. This is a significant change for Jim.

The process by which this change comes about takes place after the diary but Jim reflects on it in the second interview:

“There’s been a lot of issues around relationships I think, and the change has not filled everybody on site with the same sort of excitement, if that’s the right word, that it has for me, and people, a number of people I think, still probably feel that they’ve lost some status, even though in reality their job hasn’t changed, but there’s issues about status.... thinking about it now, I probably didn’t manage as well as I could have done, I didn’t help that situation “

What provoked this reflection was Jim having to face the consequences of his actions with people whom he liked and would not wish to hurt. Yet his actions did hurt them. One former member of the SMT writes:



“What seemed to happen was that J, C and B were spending more and more time together discussing the way forward for the depot and individuals, and because of this, the rest of the team felt dejected and demotivated. These feelings led to those of mistrust and in some cases, anger” (to March 2000)

Another writes about being rejected from the new leadership team:

“this felt really bad and myself along with the other out of favour managers formed our own clique to try and provide some support for each other. This soon became two management groups deflecting each other” (February)

He writes:

“I also felt resentment towards my GM who I had been confiding in” (January)

“I didn’t want to work for or with these kind of managers who I saw as being unethical” (January)

So we can see from these statements that a period of intense emotions and political regroupings took place as Jim tried to implement his new model. This was not simply a case of role modelling the new behaviours, whilst supporting and challenging people. This was a case when new paradigms were called for in order to understand how people would react together with some compassion and understanding for the people going through the turmoil. Jim’s formula for managing change did not work in this new situation.

Having been ‘hit’ with the unforeseen consequences and the emotional fallout of his decisions, Jim reflects on the situation and draws out some important learning:

**“KAREN**      What have you taken from that and what would you do differently?

**JIM**            I think, probably as excuse really rather than a reason but, at the time I felt that the two people involved in that competition who were W and A, both could bring something to the job, and I had a conversation with both of them that was along those lines, and I probably wasn’t ruthless enough in terms of what I meant, because the skills that they would bring, or that they would have brought out at that time, were the technical skills of the jobs that they were doing, because both of them are extremely competent at what they do, and I missed out and I don’t really understand why I did, but I know I did, I missed out the issue of their behavioural competencies, and I think if I’d have made it clearer to them, at that time, that yeah, you’ve got loads of skills technically but these are the issues that I’ve got with you because of how you do certain things, how you behave in certain circumstances, then I would have

still expected them to apply for the job, but I think I would have managed their expectations better and I think what in fact happened, it ended up with them both thinking that I wanted them both for the job, and he can't possibly want you because I know he wants me, and therefore any chance I get I'm going to do you down and vice versa, oh well in fairness A was more mature in the end than that and eventually said look, there's just too much going on in my life, I'm not going to do it, but W still went on ahead and applied, and I think that was right for him because I think he actually did learn something from the experience of being turned down, but I just think I could have managed that preamble to that stage, better."

There is a lot of learning in this passage:

"I wasn't ruthless enough"

"I missed out and I don't really understand why...I missed out on their behavioural competencies"

"I think if I'd have made it clearer to them..."

"it ended up with them both thinking that I wanted them for the job"

What Jim did was advertise a job which he had little or no intention of giving to the other members of the SMT, but he did not tell them this. In a sense he has violated his own values of openness, fairness and integrity. But he does not make sense of it in these terms (who would?!). A self serving bias makes sense of it by saying he was not "ruthless" enough. Furthermore, one member suggests that he confided in Jim as a mentor and then Jim passed this information on to the person conducting the interview for the job. Of course that is only one person's sensemaking, but it may be that Jim has violated his own values somewhat on this. In either case a number of key elements lead him to engage in reflection:

sympathy for the people involved, whom he likes

guilt that he is the cause of their pain

annoyance that his existing paradigms did not predict this.

As he says:

**"KAREN** And what provoked you reflecting on that particular incident and thinking you could have done it better?

**JIM** Just because it was clear, because when I do things I usually

think about what I've done, I don't think I do that in a formal way, but a quiet 10 minutes, or the drive home, I just think about, that was awful Jim, why the hell did you do it that way for? Just thought back through how I had handled it really and I think, can I do it differently, going forward, perhaps I will do it differently because we're approaching the same situation again."

The powerful emotions that Jim experienced needed to be processed. Jim has a learning habit and he has an honesty that causes him to challenge himself, acknowledging the mistakes he has made:

"I'm definitely a reflector, there is no question in my mind that I'm a reflector. So I tend to reflect about things all the time, you know, just little things that happen through the day, big things I can think about, it's just all going on in the subconscious all the time, I know it is. Because I get all my good ideas in the shower, so I know that happens....

With the closeness of the events we do see some self serving bias affecting his sensemaking (others are subject to 'all that stuff' that wouldn't have affected him!) but he has taken responsibility for his actions, he has generated a new paradigm for looking at change and he has committed to changing his behaviour in the future. He has also developed a new emotional orientation to his staff and team members:

"I think with the people at the site and the amount of change that we've had because we have really turned the management structure on it's head in many ways, I've got probably more patience with them than I would have had in the past, because they've had a lot to put up with" (i/v 2)

Here we see the beginnings of a new psychological paradigm based on an understanding of people's emotions and a growing compassion for the people going through change. The primary learning mechanisms here seem to have been emotional and reflective learning, supported by discursive learning and possibly some coaching via his close team member the HR Manager (this is a hypothesis based upon my own knowledge of the people involved).

## 5.2.v. What Jim Did Not Learn

We will devote a short section to what Jim did not learn.

In my discussions with people who were not part of the senior management team, there was a strong perception of Jim as being ‘invisible’. There was a joke in the warehouse and on other parts of the site that if Jim turned up on a night shift, where there were no senior managers to identify him, he would not have been allowed to enter the site as no-one would have recognised him. I gave Jim this feedback at the beginning of the year (see excerpt at the end) and he was quite Philip in his response - he did not like ‘touring’ the site, engaging in small talk with people he did not know. Jim was passionate about the need to ‘walk the talk’ but he avoided ‘management by walking about’. This quite clearly was a style issue. Jim is a strong ‘introvert’ and deep thinker. He prefers to get close to a few people and have in-depth discussions rather than have a wide circle of casual encounters and contacts and conversations at a relatively superficial level. And Jim was quite clear: he did not like it and he was not going to do it, no matter what they said on the shop floor. He believed he could delegate this task to his two ‘right hand men’, who were better at it than he was. Despite the fact that I felt a leader had to be more visible than he was he rejected this notion.

By the end of the year, the circle of people with whom Jim interacted at the depot had narrowed even further. It was clear that Jim felt comfortable with his two right hand men who like Jim, were highly intelligent, logical thinkers with similar values who could engage in Jim’s project with both heart and mind. The other members of the team did not fit this mould. Here is what one of the ‘rejected’ members of the team writes in his diary:

“What seemed to happen was that (Jim), C and B were spending more and more time together discussing the way forward for the depot and individuals and because of this, the rest of the team (the four other members) felt dejected and demotivated. These feelings led to those of mistrust and, in some cases, anger” (Ann’s diary, to March; my comments in brackets)

“myself along with the other out-of-favour managers formed our own clique to try and provide some support for each other. This soon became two management groups deflecting each other.” (Will’s diary, February)

Jim writes in his diary of August:

“I’m at the stage where I am including C and B in my thought process...I’m really pleased with their reaction and the builds they have provided to my original ideas”

One of Jim’s values is ‘involvement’:

“my style is to involve people and take advice from the group and then make the decision” (i/v 1)

“we are trying to move it, into much more involvement and getting people’s ideas and making them feel valued for a contribution” (i/v 2)

However, despite this, when it comes to an idea that is important to him, a vision of the way forward, he limits involvement quite drastically. We can look at this from a number of vantage points. Taking a leadership paradigm, this may be understandable due to the need to clarify the leadership vision before it is articulated. Taking a ‘person schema’ paradigm, Jim’s behaviour is also based upon the schemas he has of these people - B and C are intelligent, logical thinkers who share his values. When asked to describe both of them the words he uses are ‘intellectual capacity’, ‘immediately understood’. an ‘ideas man’, very ‘quick witted’, ‘very intelligent’, ‘great analytical strength’ ‘understands everything we’re trying to do, understands the business backwards’. Referring to the other senior managers, Jim does not mention their intelligence, states that each of them individually need to be more assertive and one he describes as having “some of the worse behaviours that you’d ever want in a manager”. They have ‘potential’ but have not reached that at this stage. Hence, when including two of the team in this thinking he is operating on his schemas of all the people involved. Thirdly, if we take a ‘psychological’ paradigm of Jim, Jim has a preference for close relationships of intimacy and depth:

“I think, generally, I’m a fairly private person...I like people but I don’t necessarily open up to everybody...I enjoy inter-acting with people and having a relationship but I think, a lot of the time, it’s not a deep, deep relationship. I could probably count my real friends on fingers of one hand –

real friends but I know hundreds of people and there's a big difference, isn't there? Some people, I think, can be very open with everybody that they meet and other people can't – I can't, I don't make friends readily...I think because I don't always appear to be as open as other people because I am private about things, you know, they can talk about silly things but the deep stuff is mine and I wouldn't want to share it necessarily." (i/v 1)

So in restricting the sharing of his ideas to his 'inner circle' he is also meeting a psychological need. Coupled with this is the fact that his Myers Briggs profile is both N and T, indicating a strategic, future oriented thinker who looks at things logically. Not having a strong psychological paradigm, he does not see the need to perform the function of 'leader as inspirational figure'. Even a member of his inner circle mentions this as a weakness:

"his weakness is he spends too much time doing that (thinking things through strategically) but I don't think Jim gets as close to people as he should in his role and that's because he's shy and he's introvert and he doesn't really like all that stuff"

Another manager states at the beginning of the year:

"I'd like to see him more on the floor with the blokes, he doesn't do that, maybe that's because he thinks that should be dealt with by his managers, but it wouldn't hurt"

In the second interview I tackled him on the subject:

**KAREN** It was like the attention span was very much around the people that you come in contact with along this corridor as it were, not so much people and the experiences of the people in the warehouse.

**JIM** Yes, I would say that's absolutely true and I think that's just about I think where we were and what we were focusing on, and it did feel like a lot of the time that I was doing those diaries, it was all about the senior stuff, the strategy, how we wanted it to look, planning for the future that we now have to some degree, so yeah you're absolutely right, but then I was fortunate that I had a team that could actually focus on that in terms of C and B, and I suppose it did feel a lot like I was thinking more about the strategic stuff than how much are we picking today. That goes on because I had a meeting every day with D but, and whilst it's important, some of the things that is good about the depot, is that you're very rarely under pressure...And

that's about the level of technical skills that are around the place, because people here are very very technically skilled, far more than in most other places I would guess." (i/v 2)

So Jim recognises the fact that he restricted his focus but generates logical reasons for this, from the need to focus on strategy and influencing upwards to the fact that people did not need him on the shop floor as his managers and people were very technically skilled.

Despite my intervention, Jim did not recognise the nurturing, inspirational and emotional role he had as leader of his people. He never referred again to the shop floor joke that he was 'invisible' and once he had refused to manage by walking about, he did not re-visit the subject. Jim did not want this role as it did not fit his psychological preferences; not wanting it, he did not explore it. Not exploring it, he did not realise the need his people had for his attention - whether they were shop floor workers on the night shift or the 'outgroup' of his senior management team.

By the end of the year however, Jim has developed his psychological paradigm. He recognises (albeit, somewhat grudgingly!) that people need to be 'loved' by their leader! Talking about the 'rejected' members of the senior management team he says:

"but again I think, I mean we're winning them, they understand why, none of them can argue about the logic, all of them understand why we're doing what we're doing, but there are all these other issues about, it feels as if I've been demoted and you don't love me anymore, and all that stuff." (i/v 2)

Having won the new contract to be a GM for a much larger site, Jim has a new psychological paradigm to work with. Whether he integrates this into his schema of 'leader-follower', 'converter-disciple', is the subject for another chapter in Jim's learning journey. But it is one that is seen and known by others around him:

"he doesn't actually go out of his way to communicate with people, unless they communicate with him, it's like, if you don't build a relationship with him then that's your loss, it's not a two way thing. And I think, in his position, people need a little bit of a nudge, so that they feel that they can do it it's no good just saying it, and I think that's an issue. He feels that, and he says that his door is always open and he does give that facility, but you need

to break it down a bit, it's all right just saying it, but you need to nudge people, and I think he's not very good at that, that's an issue. Another issue is that he doesn't come out of his office and deal with any other people other than managers, he doesn't go down on the floor, he doesn't speak to people, hardly, I would go as bold to say, half the workforce wouldn't know who he is, and he said that, when he first come here, the impression was that he was very much known and his policy was open and he'd go and talk to everybody." (Peter i/v 2)

"I don't think Jim gets as close to people as he should in his role, and that's because he's shy and he's introvert, and he doesn't really like all that stuff" (Bill i/v 2)



## FEEDBACK FOR JIM EDDY

*(Initial Feedback resulting from 'Learning Project' produced by Karen Blakeley, April 1999)*

There is a tendency to see the SMT as cut off from the rest of the operation. One person used the word 'isolated', which seemed to sum up some people's feelings. This contributes to the wariness mentioned above.

The SMT was praised by the people interviewed. They are seen as professional, focused on what they want and some people mentioned that they seem to 'gel together'. However they were also criticised, in a very constructive way, for staying up in their offices too much. Either they are seen as working in their offices and never on the shop floor or they are seen as making decisions that 'work on paper' but are out of touch with the real world. Visibility was a word that was used quite a lot. This has an impact on the wary, political culture that is beginning to grow. People feel that they have to make an effort to get themselves known but this is more difficult for some rather than others. Some people come into contact with the senior team more easily; also some feel happier promoting themselves whereas others find it very difficult to approach members of the SMT.

Jim in particular needs to become a more familiar face to people on the shop floor, especially, as you know, on nights! It is much easier to approach someone who is familiar, responsive and on your own territory!

There was some mention of decisions being made 'behind closed doors', where people felt they could have (and should have) been involved in the decision making process. There is an image of the SMT up in the office block looking at the operation through paperwork and statistics, rather than through what actually happens on the ground.

Jim learned in three key, inter-related areas over the year:

Developing a vision for the business: new schema, emotional orientation and behaviours

Learning how to implement change by influencing upwards; new and changed schemas, new and changed behaviours and changed emotional orientation

Learning how to implement change amongst direct reports: changed schema and emotional orientation

Much, if not most, of Jim's learning flows from the first area and particularly from his engagement with the Business Excellence Model. But we cannot say that Jim's learning simply comes from the BEM. The GM of the other company in the study also had access to the BEM, and her company were supposedly implementing it. However, she did not engage with it at all. So the question remains why did Jim first engage with this model? The answer appears to be that this model enabled Jim to logically systematise and pursue his values and goals within a business framework. All of these are very important to Jim - values, systems, logic and goals. It also appealed to his drive for perfection and continuous improvement. The BEM appealed to Jim in matters of the heart (values, goals and motivations), the mind (intellectual challenge) and style (preference for logic, systems, frameworks). I have referred to this before as 'alignment'.

So Jim's learning begins with a sense of curiosity, leading him to look into the BEM in more detail. As soon as he begins to analyse it, he realises how it can help him to achieve his goals in a manner that is congruent with his values and personal preferences (reflective, imaginative, goal and values driven learning). He becomes excited about it (emotional learning). He then observes his client, Tesco, implementing a similar system and this confirms for Jim that the model offers the

right way forward (vicarious learning). This then leads to a new goal - winning the new contract (imaginative, emotional and goal driven learning).

An incident occurs that could potentially block his goals and this stimulates a new behaviour - asking to present to the main board around the BEM and how he can win the new contract (goal driven learning).

He reads about, analyses and explores the model and soon sees the potential the model has to offer. As a result his goals expand even further to include the whole business, he changes his schema around structure and he develops a new schema around processes (reflective, declarative, discursive and imaginative learning). As his goals become more and more ambitious he changes his emotional orientation to his role; he becomes excited and determined.

At the same time, his new influencing behaviours are opening up a number of new opportunities around influencing at the senior levels. As he gains successes his self esteem grows. All of this reinforces the possibility of implementing the model within the business as a whole rather than just at depot level (imaginative and emotional learning).

Jim is experiencing alignment between his new vision (expanded goals) and his personal style. This alignment gives Jim energy, excitement and determination.

At the same time, the context of influencing at senior levels triggers his existing schemas around his senior management and around power and influence (goal driven learning). These schemas suggest that he might not achieve his goals (senior management do not understand or 'own' the vision) and, to a certain extent, hinder his success (to get senior management to 'own' the vision I need to explain it to them). The prospect of not being able to influence them 'depresses' Jim. Three separate threads of his experience serve to change this emotional orientation and his schema of senior managers, power and influence:

1. As he engages with these feelings, he explores other people's views about the situation (emotional and discursive learning). He begins to explore other possible ways of making sense of the situation. He comes across new schemas of power and influence in the company and as a result, develops his own schemas so that they become more complex;
2. At the same time, due to his new behaviour (offering to present to the board) new opportunities for influencing at senior level are presenting themselves. He begins to find himself in positions of influence, almost effortlessly. He begins to see that he can acquire power in the company. He becomes more and more optimistic.
3. As he interacts with more senior figures, he develops his schema around the senior management. He sees there are people who both understand and commit to the model. He now has a more differentiated view of senior management (discursive, trial and error learning). This more differentiated view helps him to develop 'classes' of people within the power structure - the committed, the indifferent who will go with the majority and the openly hostile. His values are important in helping to elaborate this new schema. He dislikes politics and when he sees that people are blocking what he believes is right for the business due to their own self interest he begins to see that, for some there will be nothing he can do to influence them. His attitude hardens as he realises it is not so much understanding but basic self interest that stops some people from committing to the change. He begins to construe the situation as a war. This seems to make his emotional orientation more measured - neither depressed nor overly optimistic, he now sees his cause as one that will be more drawn out than he had previously realised. He realises that his role is to continue to win over 'hearts and minds'.

Through the processes of meeting new people, discussing and reading about notions of power and influence, innovating and reflection Jim changes his schemas around the senior managers and power. As he tries to convince people and he observes their reaction to him he re-construes his role as that of a disciple for a cause that encapsulates his values and beliefs. As he realises that people oppose him due to a different set of goals and values he develops a schema around guerrilla warfare.

When it comes to implementing change below him, Jim also develops his change paradigm. At the beginning of the year, Jim's paradigm around implementing change was quite simple. It consisted of espousing the changes required, role modelling them, challenging behaviours that were not in line with them and supporting people through training, feedback and promotion. For Jim, change is simply about understanding the message and implementing it.

He tries this approach with BEM - presenting it to the team, happy that they understand it. However, this generates consequences that Jim did not anticipate - people are unhappy and their emotional reactions are becoming more and more apparent. As his teams disappointment, anger, mistrust, fear and sadness all become apparent Jim has to deal with them directly. These are not people Jim can dismiss (like those who do not share his values); Jim has to take account of their feelings and has to take responsibility for them.

Jim did not anticipate what happened. The shock made him aware that there is an emotional response to change not simply an intellectual one and that this emotional response has to be understood, respected and managed. He develops empathy.

It also made him realise that people respond to things in a different way from how he imagined he would have responded. As a result he develops a more sophisticated psychological paradigm, realising that people have needs for status and for affection that he had not paid attention to in the past.

As he manages his way through the situation his original schema around change management causes him to make a mistake with how he treats two people. The schema did not work. His values around openness and integrity stimulate some guilt around this. In addition his desire to understand would have generated further reflection on the situation. He realises the mistake and knows that he should have managed the situation differently. He generates a new schema for dealing with similar situations in the future.

Over the year, Jim grows as a leader. He develops a vision in line with his values and beliefs. He experiences alignment and this drives his enthusiasm and commitment

together with new behaviours. As he attempts to influence people in positions of power he is successful and his self esteem grows. As his understanding of what motivates people in power grows he develops his paradigm of power and influence generating a new schema around his relationship with the company - disciple in a guerrilla war. He receives the ultimate affirmation of his stance as it results in the winning of a major new contract worth a significant amount of money. Through this process he has become more self reliant, learning to trust his own judgement and his own learning. Finally, he has learned to empathise more with people going through change and has developed his psychological paradigm to incorporate an understanding of how people differ in terms of what is important to them.

# **Chapter 6. Three Findings that Comprise a New Model of Learning**

## ***6.1 Introduction***

This chapter is dedicated to the explication of three findings that emerged out of the initial immersion in the diaries. These three findings form the core of our learning model:

- the four processes that comprise all learning – paying attention, experiencing emotion, sensemaking, taking action
- the four needs that both drive and limit learning – the need for self esteem, the need to achieve goals, the need for psychological well-being and the need to fulfil our values
- the five different learning states – visionary learning, adaptive learning, dissonant learning, intrinsic learning and incidental learning.

When we look in more detail at how we change our schemas, emotional orientations and behaviour we will draw extensively on these three sets of findings - both for explanatory power and also in terms of how the analysis is structured. As a result, this chapter is dedicated to the explication of these three central findings.

## ***6.2 Finding One: A New Model of Experiential Learning***

The question that originally informed this thesis was ‘how do adults learn when their organisations go through change?’ This question is essentially focused upon process. What are the processes that seem to generate change as opposed to stasis? What generates profound transformation as opposed to minor adaptation?

To begin to answer this question I identified a list of learning processes as outlined in chapter three on methodology.

Using these definitions I tracked a number of the diarists' learning in great detail. What became apparent from this exercise was that two processes *always* occurred in every learning event, whilst the other processes were contingent upon circumstances. The two processes that always occurred were 'emotional learning' and 'reflection'.

In fact, as I applied these terms they began to change in their meaning. 'Emotional learning' was re-defined as follows:

'the experience of a new or different emotion in relation to a cue which may generate further emotions, questions, needs or actions. The experience of the original emotion thereby causes the learner to change his/her emotional orientation, constructs or behaviour in relation to the cue.'

For example, a diarist might focus attention on a comment made by her manager. This could generate an intense emotional response such as 'anger' which might have several consequences. It might generate:

a question – 'what did he mean by that?'

a need – a need to act in some way to release the anger

self-analysis – 'why am I feeling so angry?'

an insight – 'so that is what he thinks of me'

a changed emotional orientation – 'I used to like him, now I hate him'

a new or changed behaviour – e.g. openly criticising her manager

So when an emotional response to a cue leads to change in constructs, behaviour or emotional orientation in relation to that cue, it is termed emotional learning.

Emotional learning is not simply the experience of an emotion. Using the example above, the manager's comment may be typical of him and simply reinforce what she already believed. The experience of anger simply reinforces what she already feels about her manager and her current situation. It does not lead to any change. If this is the case, the experience of emotion is not an experience of 'emotional learning'.

'Reflection' based learning simply became the process of making sense of something in a way that generated changes in emotional orientation, constructs or behaviour.



This need not be a retrospective making sense (as in ‘what did that mean?’). It could refer to making sense of future implications of an event (‘What are the implications of this for me? ‘What might this mean for the future?’ ‘What do I need to do about it?’). It could mean making sense of things in the ‘here and now’ – ‘what does this mean right now?’; ‘what constructs do I have that would make sense of this for me?’: ‘what other ways might there be of making sense of this?’; ‘how should I act in response to this cue?’. I therefore changed my terminology at this point – abandoning ‘reflection’ and using the term ‘sensemaking’ in its place. Sensemaking that led to learning (transformational sensemaking) was the process of:

‘interpreting a cue using new or different constructs, schemas or paradigms in a way that leads to changes in existing beliefs, changes in emotional orientation and/or changes in behaviour’

Many of the other processes, I found, simply facilitated emotional learning and transformational sensemaking by:

- i. bringing an individual’s attention to something that might have been missed (e.g. feedback, coaching)
- ii. helping the individual make sense of something using new constructs (e.g. training, discursive learning, comparative learning declarative learning, coaching)
- iii. helping the individual process their emotions more effectively (e.g. coaching, training, vicarious learning)

At this stage, whilst it appeared that emotion and what I called sensemaking, were central to all learning, I began to become aware of another important process central for learning – ‘attention’.

I became intrigued as to what made people pay attention to one thing as opposed to another. The learning maps always started with what I called the ‘catalyst’, ‘trigger’ or ‘cue’. People always learned in response to something catching their attention and often what was fascinating was the uniqueness of the cues that caught people’s attention. Amongst the melee of competing stimuli we select some cues for our

attention at the expense of others. At the outset of the research I had not ‘problematized’ the notion of attention. I started the study assuming that there would be a high degree of commonality in the cues that people mentioned in their diaries. However, on first analysis I found very little commonality in the diarists’ cues. The individual events that caught people’s attention were predominantly unique to them. ***Over the year, only one event in each organisation was mentioned by more than four diarists.*** In the case of SS, this event was the merger between two parts of the organisation. The only other event to catch the attention of more than two diarists was the leaving of the MD – Sandy Simmonds. In both cases the events were mentioned only when the individual concerned was directly affected by them.

In the case of LL, the only event mentioned by more than three diarists was the reduction of the senior management team from seven to four members. This is because it affected six of the diarists personally. Those who were not affected personally did not mention the event.

This was surprising not only because I had assumed that there would be more commonality in the sensemaking but also because it calls into question some of the assumptions of the ‘social learning’ movement. Social learning may indeed be taking place when people gather together in groups to discuss a common event or issue but it does not appear to be central to what dominates people’s attention and personal interest. People appeared to be more focused on personal rather than communal issues. This may have been due to use of the diary as a methodology however. People often construe the diary as a mechanism for recording deeply personal thoughts and feelings. However, for me, it did call into question the psychological status of social learning – almost as if it is a function of the group (as claimed by Gheradi, 2000; and Lave and Wenger, 1991) yet at the same time peripheral to the individual’s central concerns.

Feeling concerned that I would not be able to draw any comparisons between the diarists’ learning, I decided to investigate further the types of cues that were catching people’s attention. It eventually emerged that there were in fact great commonalities in what people paid attention to. These commonalities were not grounded in the content of the events that they experienced. What might be a significant event for one

person might be irrelevant to another. People were not interested in the same or similar events. The commonalities lay in the function that the events played in the diarists' inner psychological world – i.e. people were interested in events that impacted on their personal goals and desires. We shall look at this more closely in the next section (6.2). For now however, it appeared to me that the first step on any learning journey was the emergence of a cue that caught the individual's attention and upon which the subsequent emotions and sensemaking activity was focused. This accords with the Gestalt notion of selecting the figure from the ground – a step vital in the whole psychodynamic process. The process of focusing attention on a cue is neither random nor accidental – it is a 'choice' (whether conscious or unconscious) that reveals something about the underlying psycho-dynamic forces that drive and affect learning. Attention seemed linked to learning in two ways:

1. paying a different kind of attention to a cue that often gained your attention e.g. A mother pays attention to her child in all sorts of ways. However, one day she may pay a different kind of attention to her child – worrying that the child seems upset or worried. The attention in this case becomes more concentrated.
2. Selecting new or different cues from the environment for attention.

Hence I defined *attentional learning* as follows:

“focusing one's mental and emotional resources upon new or different cues or changing the quality of one's mental and emotional focus upon familiar cues”

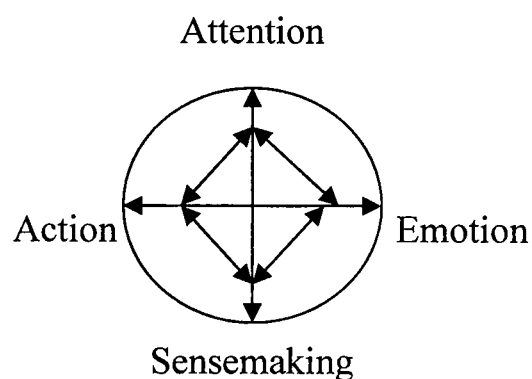
I now had the following three core processes that appeared central to all learning:

- ◆ attention
- ◆ emotion
- ◆ sensemaking.

At this stage, however, I felt that I could not properly focus upon learning without taking into account one more process – the taking of action in which behaviour

change is manifested. Whilst action was not always necessary for learning to take place (people could simply change their constructs or emotional orientations without changing their behaviour) in very many cases actions did take place that led to new and/or changed behaviour. Indeed it would not be sensible to derive a set of core learning processes which could not account for one of the key learning outcomes – new or changed behaviour.

Hence I derived a core learning cycle that looked as follows:



The arrows indicate that these processes do not occur in any order – emotion can lead to attention can lead to sensemaking which leads to action which leads to emotion.

However, on analysing the diagram further it became apparent that just because we pay attention to something, experience an emotion, make sense of it and act on our interpretation, this does not necessarily lead to learning. For example, we may pay attention to some feedback that suggests that our presentation skills are not as polished as they could be. We may feel intense irritation at the feedback. We make sense of it by using an old construct, claiming that the individual giving us the feedback is jealous of us and wants to undermine our confidence. We act on this interpretation by carrying on as normal. In this example we have not learned as there are no new behaviours, no new beliefs and no changed emotional orientation towards either the giver of the feedback or towards the presentation process.

However, if we process the feedback differently, it could lead to learning. We pay attention to the feedback and still experience irritation. However we listen to the feedback and conclude that they have a point. As a result we change our presentation style and also change our emotional orientation towards the giver of the feedback,

feeling grateful that they went to the trouble of trying to help us. In this case we have learned as we have changed our beliefs around our presentation style, we have changed our behaviour and we have changed our emotional orientation towards the person who gave us the feedback.

In the first example the cycle simply represents the activity of processing information based upon previous learning. In the second example the cycle has become a learning cycle because it has generated a learning output. Learning has occurred in at least one of what I called the four points of transition – attention, emotion, sensemaking or action. Hence the cycle as depicted above could just as easily represent the information processing cycle. If, however, learning occurs at one of the four transition points, it becomes a learning cycle. But for this to happen ‘attention’ needs to be broadened or focused differently, and/or new emotions need to be experienced, and/or sensemaking needs to involve change, and/or action needs to involve new or changed behaviours. *In other words effort needs to be invested in our attentional, emotional, cognitive and/or behavioural responses to a cue. Instead of unthinkingly attending to cues that come across our paths, experiencing consequent emotions, making sense of the cue and acting upon it we have to apply effort to focus attention more broadly, focus on our emotions, think differently and act differently.*

The learning cycle then has to involve at least one of the following processes:

*attentional learning*: focusing one’s mental and emotional resources upon new or different cues or changing the quality of one’s mental and emotional focus upon familiar cues

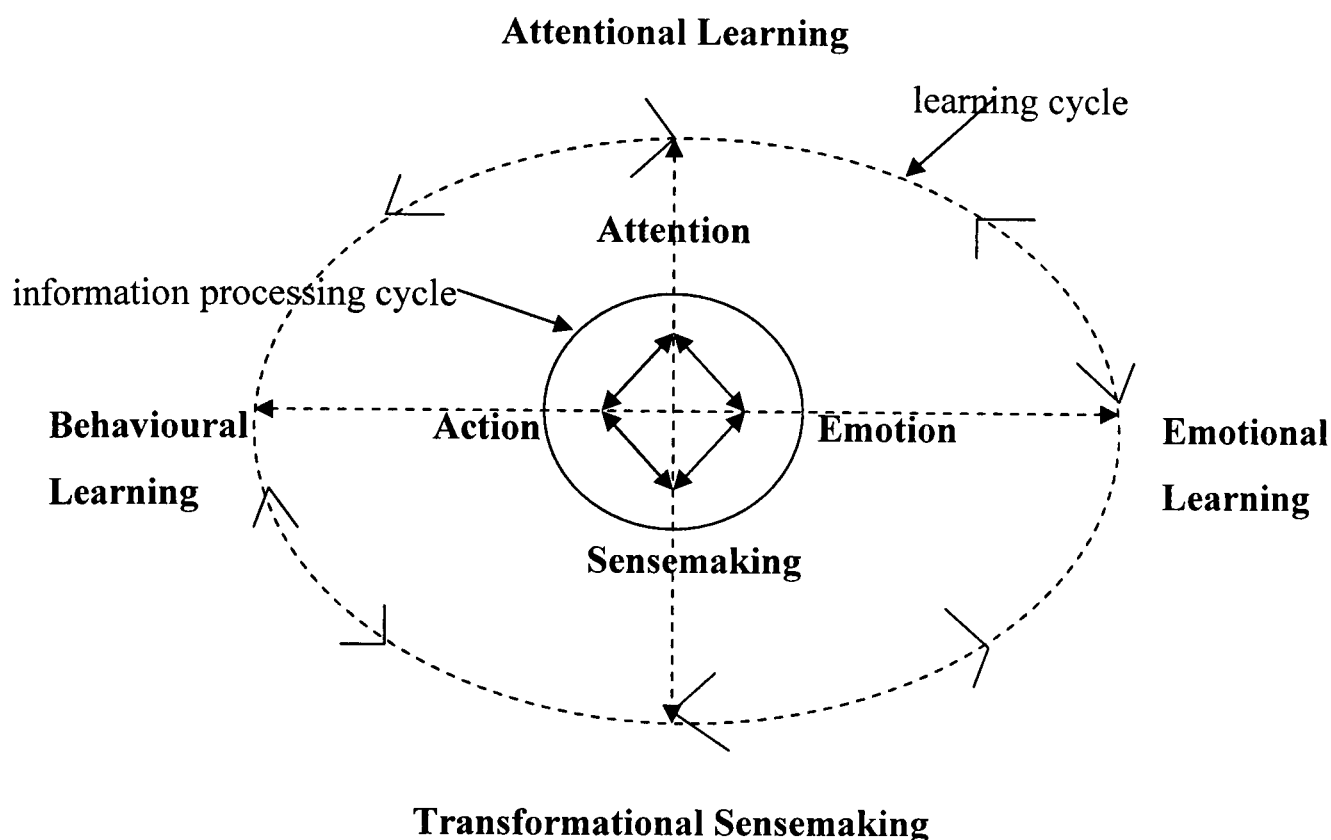
*emotional learning* : the experience of a new or different emotion in relation to a cue

*transformational sensemaking*: interpreting a cue using new or different constructs, schemas or paradigms which generates changes in existing beliefs

*behavioural learning*: generating new or changed behaviours in response to a cue.....

.....all of which generates further emotions, questions, needs or actions which in turn lead to changes in emotional orientation, constructs or behaviour.

The learning cycle can now be drawn as follows:



The diagram above is intended to show the information processing cycle in the middle and the learning cycle on the outside. It is important to note that learning need not encompass all four learning processes and we can move from learning to information processing and vice versa. We might start our learning with paying attention to a cue in the normal way (typical of information processing). Suddenly however, we experience an emotion that we have never experienced before in relation to this cue. In this example, we have moved from ‘attention’ in the inner circle to emotional learning in the outer circle. We may decide not to give this emotion further thought attributing it to ‘getting out of the wrong side of bed’. In this case we have moved back into sensemaking on the inner circle – attributing to the emotion pre-existing constructs that require no change in our meaning structures.

We can move between the information processing and the learning cycles at will. But to stay on the outside learning cycle will require effort and will. Once learning begins neither the outcomes nor the process can be predicted. The uncertainty, the anxiety and sheer effort involved in learning implies a long-term pull towards the centre and a shift towards information processing.

The arrows linking all the parts of the circle depict the fact that these stages are not sequential. For example, a new emotion may make us pay more conscious attention to something that we had not noticed before. Emotion can trigger a new behaviour without going through a conscious sensemaking phase<sup>4</sup>. We might spontaneously generate a new behaviour in a situation which could subsequently provoke conscious sensemaking.<sup>5</sup> What we intend by this simple model is to focus upon the four core learning processes. The other processes (e.g. coaching, experimental, declarative, vicarious, practical learning) are essentially facilitative of these central processes<sup>6</sup>.

However odd it may appear, the distinction between learning and simple information processing is not new. Weick (1995) distinguishes sensemaking<sup>7</sup> from “automatic information processing”:

“sensemaking begins with the basic question, is it still possible to take things for granted? And if the answer is no, if it has become impossible to continue with automatic information processing, then the question becomes, “why is this so?” And, “what next?” (1995:14)

One of the diarists makes a similar distinction between automatic processing and learning:

“I know things are going to go that way because they’ve happened in the past...but you know things aren’t a revelation, they’re not a surprise, and that’s where I have these problems with, when you say, tell me about what you’ve been learning because **I feel the lessons were learned in the past, and you react...**things that have happened and I’ve already learnt that and I know, so there doesn’t seem to be any new learning, **it’s only new if it’s**

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<sup>4</sup> LeDoux (1998: 164)

<sup>5</sup> Weick puts it thus: ‘how can I know what I think till I see what I say’? (1995:12)

<sup>6</sup> This is important for the subsequent analysis as, due to my belief in these four central processes, I focused upon these at the expense of the other processes. As a result, the analysis does not have much to say about vicarious learning, or training or coaching. It is assumed that these latter processes are just methods to facilitate the underlying learning taking place through the more fundamental core processes.

<sup>7</sup> Weick uses the term ‘sensemaking’ in the same way as I use the term ‘learning’

**different to what happened in the past and you think there is a sequence, you know, it's not a one off, there is a trend there,** but that seems to happen less and less, now whether that's normal in somebody reaching my mature age.” (Mat Steele, i/v 2, my emphases)

Both Weick and Mat Steele, in their different ways, are making an important distinction between the type of mental (and emotional) work that is involved in learning and that which is involved in automatic information processing. The latter involves making use of past learning (existing constructs, emotional orientations and behaviours) to guide present actions and interpretations. Learning however involves the creation of new constructs/emotional orientations/behaviours in order to guide responses. Weick distinguishes sensemaking (what I term learning) from information processing precisely because sensemaking is a ‘creative’ process:

“The act of interpreting implies that something is there, a text in the world, waiting to be discovered or approximated...Sensemaking, however, is less about discovery than it is about invention. To engage in sensemaking is to construct, filter, frame, create facticity (Turner, 1987), and render the subjective into something more tangible....to sense something, there must be something there to create the sensation. And sensemaking suggests the construction of that which then becomes sensible.” (1995:14)

This distinction between learning and automatic information processing is vitally important in the study of learning. This is because learning involves similar processes to information processing but unlike information processing it is not automatic and cannot be taken for granted. Learning involves the “construction and bracketing” of cues in different and novel ways and “the revision of...interpretations based on action and its consequences” (Weick, 1995: 8). It involves the expenditure of energy in difficult, often anxiety provoking mental and emotional work (Weick, 1995: 11). It involves the ‘will’ to change from information processing to learning. What Mat is saying is that as he gets older he finds it less and less necessary to engage in the difficult work of learning. This is because his answer to Weick’s question “is it still possible to take things for granted?”, is ‘yes’. Hence he finds he does not need to ‘learn’ in order to act effectively (“the lessons were learned in the



past, and you react...things that have happened and I've already learnt that and I know").

The next question I then had to answer was 'what caused people to undertake the often difficult process of change'? What caused people to exercise their 'will' and engage in learning as opposed to standard information processing? And how was this manifested within the four core processes. These questions took me to the next central idea: the four main drivers of learning.

### 6.3 *Finding Two: What Drives our Learning*

Of course the intriguing question raised by the above analysis is:

‘what causes people to move from simple information processing (using past learning to guide action) to learning involving change in underlying constructs, emotional orientations and behaviours?’

If I can make sense of a cue in a way that preserves existing beliefs and behaviours what causes me to make sense of it in a way that requires me to change? This assumes of course that people have to have a reason to change. We will see in the following chapters that, many, not all, people do have to have a reason to change – as change involves risk and pain and effort. Paul Richards points out one dynamic at play here:

I suppose I’m the sort of person that, when exposed to novel ideas, perhaps in a standard scientific training, to begin with, you don’t necessarily trust them but as you live with them and have reflected upon them *for a year or two*, you then think of them as being the bleeding obvious, even though that’s what I’m saying that, it’s taken me some time to accept that way of looking at things, *and now I’ve got, having made that, having put my entire livelihood now, behind that way of thought, I still have to have the motivation to go through with it.* (i/v 2, my emphases)

Let’s look at some more examples from the diaries:

#### *Financial Print Out*

It was implied that one of my projects was £10k overspend, but I do not believe it. (Mat Steele, August)

Here Mat Steele, blocks out the information that implies the need for potentially uncomfortable learning. There are not many examples of this clear denial of information and avoidance of learning. By definition the diarists will have engaged in some sensemaking prior to entering the cue in the diary. *More often we encounter*

*examples of people making sense of events in ways that avoid the need for change.*

As we have seen with the information processing cycle, simply because one engages in the task of sensemaking does not mean that the sensemaking will lead to change.

Let us look at how Ann makes sense of her 360 feedback:

**“Discussion with Karen Blakeley re 360 feedback:**

Was slightly disappointed by the subordinates’ results on the feedback.

Reflected on this a little and came to the conclusion that because of the differences in the way people score I couldn’t actually read an awful lot into the results anyway.” (May)

Here Ann enters into the task of sensemaking (‘reflected on this a little’) but clearly does not wish to engage in a potentially painful, complex process involving personal change. She attributes the feedback to the ‘differences in the way people score’. This is a construct that I introduced as an aid for making sense of the feedback and it is interesting to see how in this case the utilisation of a new construct allows Ann to obviate the need for deeper, more painful construct change. This is important. Ann *has* learned because, using our definition, she has incorporated a new construct into her repertoire – the notion of ‘scoring bias’. Hence there has been a creative process here that allows Ann to conclude that the results have no meaning! Hence, all of Ann’s learning has enabled her to interpret the cue in a way that avoids potential learning and change. She has learned superficially in order to avoid deeper learning – I call this surface or conservative sensemaking vs. deep or transformational sensemaking.

People may put a lot of psychological effort into minimising information that implies they might have to change. We see this with two of our diarists. Jim Barnes is involved in a high profile project failure. Having delivered the final report to the client, he writes:

“Got the report out just in time. There are lots of lessons to be learned from this but they are mostly on the contractual side. *I don’t think Ray or myself could have done things much differently.* Of all the jobs I’ve ever worked on

with SS I've found this to be the most frustrating and probably the least enjoyable." October (My emphasis)

This is remarkably similar to another diarist's sensemaking. John Gray, spends a lot of time marketing a new product but the expenses involved outweigh the sales achieved over the year:

"ironically we've done almost no business...it'll never pay for all the investment" (i/v 2)

Despite this, John insists that they could not have done anything differently. Everything they did was right:

"the business was done rightly, properly, everybody believed it, we put all the sales and marketing, we broke the deployment paradigm, we put the right people in it, the right investment, we had.... our Chairman, and presented it on a one to one with him, got him to sign the personal letters going out to other chairmen, and absolutely everything you could possibly wish" (i/v 2)

"I've no doubt that what we did for that particular product was absolutely right, and it's just that in the end the market wasn't there...actually in general I think the whole business feels very positive about that failure.

**KAREN** Really. Why do they feel positive about that failure?

**JOHN** Because they know that everything was done right." (i/v 2)

There is a similar tone in both diarists' insistence that 'everything was done right', nothing could have been "done much differently". There is an almost obsessive insistence in John's account with the word 'right' appearing three times in two sentences and the use of absolutes such as 'everybody', 'absolutely everything' 'absolutely right', 'everything was done right'. There is a feeling of intense psychological effort being poured into this sensemaking process to convince oneself (and the listener) of its veracity. In both cases the diarists make sense of events in ways that support self esteem and obviate the need for deep personal change. They

have engaged in surface or conservative learning at the expense of deep or transformational learning.

Later however, given more distance from the events, Jim decides that he could have done many things differently. He faces the fact that during the project he avoided painful issues:

“I think there is a tendency with projects to, if things start to go wrong, to sort of, it’s almost burying your head in the sand, there is a tendency to try to beaver away and think well if I just do some extra hours on this, we’ll turn it round and we’ll get it right, and I think that’s wrong because one of the lessons from this is that once you start to overspend on a project, you never ever recover it. You might think you’ve got other tasks where you can recover the overspend on an early task, but it just doesn’t work like that” (i/v 2)

Having faced the deep as opposed to surface learning he decides to give a presentation to his colleagues on things that people can do to avoid project failure. So his initial sensemaking around the event, is either fulfilling other functions (such as the maintenance of self esteem in the face of a failure) or is surface oriented, ‘quick and dirty’ processing that changes after a period of reflection.

Whatever functions might lie behind the learning, all three examples above (Ann, John and Jim) seem to be attempting to support self esteem and avoiding the need for deep personal change. Another way of putting this might be that Ann, John and Jim all recognise (probably subconsciously) that to engage deeply with these cues would encompass deep, personal and probably painful change and they decide (probably subconsciously) that they do not want to do this. In addition to this we note that Jim does decide to engage with the difficult learning but only after the initial and intense pain associated with the event has died down.

We are therefore left with two questions:

‘what causes people to move from simple information processing (using past learning to guide action) to learning involving change in underlying constructs, emotional orientations and behaviours?’

‘what causes people to move from surface or conservative learning to deep or transformational learning?’

It was in answering these questions that the strong and consistent effect of some deep needs became apparent. This forms the basis of the second central idea of this research – that **people learn in order to satisfy deep needs**. These needs are what I term the ‘drivers’ of learning.

In determining what causes people to decide to undertake the painful task of learning I decided to track what people paid attention to in their learning diaries. What were people actually prepared to learn about? In what areas were people prepared to engage in personal change? What cues were people extracting from the ‘general flow of experience’? Are there any similarities? This would give me an indication of the areas people focused their learning upon. It would distinguish the areas where people learned as opposed to the areas that people ignored.

In order to answer this question a meta-analysis was conducted of each of the individual diarist’s attention patterns (see learning biographies). A distinction was made between the ‘cue’ and the ‘learning domain’. The cue was the original event that sparked sensemaking and the learning domain was the area that the individual focused his or her sensemaking upon. For example a cue might refer to a client meeting. The learning domain might be ‘how to negotiate effectively with clients’ or it might be ‘how to build close relationships’ or it might be to do with ‘implementing better service delivery’.

The cue is the event. The learning domain is the area that the individual is prepared to focus his or her attention on in order to engage in personal learning. All the learning domains mentioned by each diarist were recorded by charting what they paid attention to and the areas they learned in (see individual learning biographies).

Somewhat surprisingly, there was a high degree of commonality in the areas that people learned about. Forty learning domains were derived altogether (see appendix 1 for the learning domains recorded). A frequency count was then conducted, recording the number of times each diarist mentioned each learning domain. The top ten mentions for each organisation are shown below:

### Scientific Solutions

	Learning Domain	Frequency of Mention
1	Feelings	330
2	My role/career	117
3	My behaviour	103
4	My performance/competence	90
5	Staff issues	68
6	The organisation	67
7	My boss	65
8	Processes and outcomes – or ‘what works’	57
9	relationships and support	47
10	i. Self esteem ii. Management	46 46

### Logical Logistics

	Learning Domain	Frequency of Mention
1	Feelings	300
2	Peers (total)	93
3	Staff issues	90
4	Processes and outcomes or ‘what works’	83
5	My performance/competence	78
6	My behaviour	74
7	My role/career	64
8	Self esteem	54
9	My skills	40
10	Understanding people	35

The tables above suggest that there is a remarkable degree of commonality in the areas where people focus their learning. The areas are:

- i. Achieving my goals often by understanding ‘what works’ in the world

- ii. My emotions – making sense of them in order to achieve emotional well-being
- iii. My self esteem – preserving, protecting and enhancing my self esteem
- iv. My values – preserving and protecting my values (this is not clear from the above table but the importance of values will be demonstrated below).

I began to become convinced that people would engage in transformatory learning if, in doing so, they saw the likelihood of achieving any of the above outcomes. In other words learning is driven by the needs for goal fulfilment, emotional well-being, high self esteem and preserving integrity or consistency. As mentioned before, this idea plays such an important role in the subsequent chapters that I felt it needed separate explication and support in this chapter. As this is so important we will devote some time to looking at the dynamics involved with each driver in more detail.

### ***6.3.i Achieving Goals***

There are many examples of people engaging in transformational sensemaking in order to achieve their goals. The importance of goals manifests itself in two ways: firstly, the focus on anything that appears relevant to goal achievement and secondly, more indirectly, by focusing on understanding ‘what works’ in the world. By understanding what works in the world we are able to exercise control and predict future outcomes.

We can see this in the following examples:

Will Payne comes back from a major secondment convinced he is going to receive a promotion onto the newly formed top team. He is tremendously ambitious and desperately wants the job. He doesn’t get it:

“I really couldn’t understand what was going on. Surely if I had been that close to getting the job then how could I now not be suitable after all my GM stated himself that this was the hardest decision he has ever had to make. Any positive feelings I had now started to reduce quickly and dropped lower over the transition stage” (Will Payne, February)



As a result, Will goes into deep sensemaking mode (as well as changing his behaviour and his emotional orientation towards his boss). He comes out of the learning with a powerful new construct and a complete change of schema in terms of 'how to get on' (his predominant goal):

“What I’ve learnt in summary is that, perception is everything, and I may have been the best person for that job, but the perception of others may have been that that’s not team fit, and that may be an individual choice, but what I’ve realised is that things like this are not necessarily within my control, and that all I can do is do and act appropriately and what comes along comes along. Pretty much not have this blind ambition which was driving me, my driver was blind ambition, and it’s got to a point now where I believe that if I don’t fit with, I’m not saying that it’s jobs for the boys, what I’m saying is it’s clear, if you look at Jim, and the team around him, they are all very similar in the way that they interact, he feels comfortable with those individuals, talking about other things than work, it’s like a round table as it were, they are people that he feels comfortable with, and I clearly don’t fit that, and that’s what I believe it is. The reasons for that is that I don’t necessarily interact with John, I do about work, but I don’t sit in there and just talk with him as such, and I think that has a lot to do with it as well.” (i/v 3)

**Will’s sensemaking around this cue has been deeply transformational. And part of the reason he was willing to engage in this deep and painful process was that it was highly goal relevant.** Will articulates how his learning and his goals are linked:

“I’ve had a rapid promotion over the last two years based on purely ability or being flash in the pan sort of thing and I’ve identified that, that although that’s done me ok getting to here **then to actually move on from this kind of level, you know, you need to have a bit more sustainability in terms of - what are the values like - you know - being honest with people all of the time and being more professional really.**

**Karen:** What do you mean by that - professional?

**Will:** Professional in terms of me having a piece of information is important and not having to go and tell other people to make me feel big - **accept the responsibility and use it properly as opposed to use it as a tool to show people how important that you are which is pretty much where I was before** - I was consistently showing everybody how good and how brilliant I am” (i/v 2, my emphases)

Will has experienced deep, painful and profoundly transformational learning here, affecting not only his understanding of what works and how to behave in the world but also his underlying values. It is clear that at least part of the reason he does so is that it is highly central to his goal of career progression.

Kay’s goal is to change the culture of the organisation and gain experience of managing change at Board level. For this reason, she is prepared to open up her construing and learn what she needs in order to be effective. On a two day conference she spends the first day trying to persuade the Board to accept her ideas:

“On second day, 3<sup>rd</sup> party new attendee confirmed my comments and suspicions, bit hacked off that they listened to him but not to me” (May)

This must have been extremely frustrating for her as it has major implications for her goals of influencing people to get culture change (it is characterised by a minus 9 on her emotion chart). She could have interpreted this incident in many ways (they don’t respect me, they’ll never listen to me) but her response is interesting:

“maybe I should reflect on why/how he managed to get them to come to their senses.” (May)

Here Kay is prepared to learn how to change her approach in order to achieve the bigger goal of influencing people.

Another way to observe the relevance of goals for sensemaking and learning is to compare what people make sense of and pay attention to in their diaries and their goals.

Again, there appears to be a high degree of consistency in people's goals. The main goals that people have been clustered as follows (see appendix 2 for each diarist's expressed goals):

**1. *Successful task completion to progress career***

This entails the desire to achieve goals established in one's role (e.g. to grow the business) in order to move upwards in the organisation

**2. *To gain experience to progress career***

This entails the desire to gain experience in a new role in order to improve one's CV and improve the career prospects for the future whether this be with the organisation or not

**3. *Change aspects of career***

Many respondents wanted to change aspects of their career or role. Some wanted to move out of their current careers altogether (from science to OD – AG), whilst others wanted to change the emphasis (from service to industry – BB, from a professional role to general management – AS and KM)

**4. *Successful task completion to establish one's competence - to self and to others.***

Many people simply wanted to be successful to prove to themselves and to others that they could do the job – they could be an effective GM (JE), they could make the transition from public into private sector (CS), they could operate at senior levels (JG). Probably connected to this desire for success is a fear of failure – probably an important motivational drive for many of the participants, though never stated directly as such.

**5. *Interest, job satisfaction.***

Many people were happy doing a job that was intrinsically interesting and motivating. When they were not in a job that was providing this intrinsic satisfaction their concern was to find a job that would.

**6. *Professional challenge.***

Professional challenge is different from simply being successful. I have indicated that people's goals were orientated towards professional challenge when they seemed to have an intrinsic interest in the 'content' of what they were trying to achieve. Hence, Jim Eddy cared passionately about the BEM. It was not simply that he wanted to implement it in order to be successful and avoid failure – he believed passionately in BEM and what it represented. So too with Mat Steele – he believes passionately in the Fire team and also in promoting his risk scale. There is a sense in both of these examples that people want to succeed because they feel it would be for the benefit of others and the organisation that they do.

**7. *Lifestyle goals/values – retirement, balance, family etc***

Some people did not have specific goals beyond the desire to maintain or achieve a certain lifestyle – time for family, time for enjoyment outside work, retire as early as possible etc. I have construed this as standing for certain lifestyle values rather than task oriented goals.

## 8. *Job security*

Some people were simply concerned to protect their job security. This however, is a goal that most people probably share. As seen in the example of Charles King and Jim Barnes, whilst they both started the year expressing lifestyle values, incidents occur that jeopardise their job security and force them to focus on this, suggesting that this was a tacit goal, underlying their values.

When we look at these goals then, we can see that there are five main areas that concern the diarists:

1. successful task completion – understanding ‘what works’
2. personal competence – both in their own eyes and how this is viewed by others
3. managing their careers – progression, change of career, security
4. finding fulfilment – challenge, interest, satisfaction etc
5. lifestyle and values

When we look at the main learning domains we can map them onto the goals:

<b>Goal</b>	<b>Learning Domain - SS</b>	<b>Learning Domain - LL</b>
successful task completion	feelings (1 <sup>st</sup> ) staff issues (5 <sup>th</sup> ) processes and outcomes (8 <sup>th</sup> )	feelings (1 <sup>st</sup> ) staff issues (3 <sup>rd</sup> ) Processes and outcomes (4 <sup>th</sup> )
personal competence – both in their own eyes and how this is viewed by others	feelings (1 <sup>st</sup> ) my behaviour (3 <sup>rd</sup> ) my performance and/or competence (4 <sup>th</sup> ) self esteem (10 <sup>th</sup> )	feelings (1 <sup>st</sup> ) my performance and/or competence (5 <sup>th</sup> ) self esteem (8 <sup>th</sup> ) my skills (9 <sup>th</sup> ) my behaviour (6 <sup>th</sup> )
managing their careers – progression, change of career, security	feelings (1 <sup>st</sup> ) my role or career (2 <sup>nd</sup> )	feelings (1 <sup>st</sup> ) my role career (7 <sup>th</sup> ) peers (2 <sup>nd</sup> )
finding fulfilment – challenge, interest, satisfaction etc	feelings (1 <sup>st</sup> ) my values (16 <sup>th</sup> )	feelings (1 <sup>st</sup> ) my values (17 <sup>th</sup> )
lifestyle issues	feelings (1 <sup>st</sup> ) my values (16 <sup>th</sup> )	feelings (1 <sup>st</sup> ) my values (17 <sup>th</sup> )

This is admittedly a somewhat rough and ready approach to mapping group goals on to group attention patterns or learning domains. But it does reinforce what we were seeing at the individual level – that much of the conscious attention and

transformational sensemaking is taking place in areas participants deem important for the achievement of their goals.

Let us now look at how values stimulate transformational sensemaking.

### **6.3.ii Personal Values**

Although ‘values’ rate 16<sup>th</sup> (SS) and 17<sup>th</sup> (LL) on the list of learning domains, this does not adequately represent the role that values appear to play in learning. This is because a mention in the diary was only allocated to ‘values’ if ‘values’ were specifically and explicitly mentioned (e.g. ‘I believe that openness is very important in business’). However, values play a very important role in learning even when not specifically mentioned as values. Instead we note the role of ‘guilt’ (central to sensemaking), the use of words such as ‘ought’, ‘should’, ‘right’ and ‘wrong’. If we had included references to these factors, then ‘values’ would have ranked far higher in the list of learning domains. Let us look at some of the diary entries and interviews to see the role that values play in learning:

“it’s just the feeling that we’re just part of this business model now and that’s all we are, rather than, you see for me, work is a place that ought to be, you spend so much of your life here, it’s got to be an enjoyable place to be, you’ve got to be doing enjoyable things....And I think, and it’s like when *Thatcher said, there’s no such thing as society, you get the impression that somebody at the top here, has sort of decreed, that there is no social aspect to work, and that we’re all units of resource to be allocated at will, whenever and wherever to achieve the objectives, without any thought about the society of how individual’s how each individual is motivated.*” (Paul Richards, interview 1)

“my candid approach and our discussion about how he is coping with change has paid off. Relieved at this acceptance I really didn’t think he would sign up; *feel a little sense of guilt that he may not easily find a new job.*

Commercially will be good, he is a barrier to change, in longer term others in the department will benefit.” (Kay Mendes, April)

“if you manage it properly then *you need to look after everyone* and you don’t want to get in the mess that they did over the that situation, it just looks bad and reflects badly on the management team does nothing at all for the morale of the individuals involved” (Charles King, interview 1)

“I don’t know how to describe it, but it’s steadily reduced, you know, down scaled if anything, into sort of, *almost peddling flesh*, you know, a job wants to be done there, you can do it, you can go and do it, there’s no matching of skills and experience to the customer requirements, and *in that we’re quite abusive of the customer.*” (Sally Peters, interview 2)

“And I mean we’ve had some trigger points with that question, I mean the issues around the business excellence model clarified my thinking, no question about that, stuff around Balanced Scorecard, which came before that, *just makes you think about things and what’s important and having thought about what’s important, you then think about how you can achieve what’s important and that changes your mind to how you want to do things, what’s important to you.*” (Jim Eddy, interview 2)

“Found out that local job had not been offered through normal channels. Unhappy for two reasons. Firstly job opportunity seems what I am looking for. Secondly HRD has not followed rules - but is main advocate of equal opportunity in TBG. *Interesting question again about how and why we should live our values - how do we ensure we can walk the talk?*” (Bill Fineman, April)

There are many more quotations that could have been included here. Values are ubiquitous. And they are ubiquitous in how they direct our attention, how they guide our sensemaking and how they make us feel. Connor (1993) puts it thus:

“Value is inescapable. This is not to be taken as a claim form the objective existence or categorical force of any values or imperatives in particular; but rather as a claim that the processes of estimating, ascribing, modifying,

affirming and even denying value, in short the process of evaluation, can never be avoided” (1993:31)

We cannot make sense of something, ascribe meaning to a cue, without at some stage evaluating it. Is it good or bad, right or wrong, fair or unfair, desirable or undesirable? Moreover, we cannot make sense of our own behaviour (the favourite focus of our sensemaking activity) without evaluating whether we acted wisely or foolishly, honestly or dishonestly, kindly or unkindly, openly or deceitfully. In this way, then, values infuse the learning process.

At this point it should be noted that some people are more sensitive to values than others. When we look at the diarists’ attention patterns:

- ◆ only four people mentioned values or culture as the main focus of their attention: two of those four also expressed their *goals* in terms of lifestyle values (work/life balance, family, enjoyment outside work)
- ◆ five people left their organisation; four of the five cited the values of the organisation as being one of the reasons

This is not to say that other diarists did not mention their values and/or the organisation’s values, but it does appear that values are more actively used by some people than they are by others. Bill Fineman, for example, makes explicit reference to values on over 10 occasions in the diaries; further mentions are made of people’s style, conflicts of interests, walking the talk, and the right and wrong thing to do in various situations. In fact references to values are the third most frequently mentioned learning domain for Bill. In the first interview Bill mentions values on 14 occasions. In the second interview he mentions them on 10 occasions.

If we take Tim Howes, however, no mentions are made of values, at all. Tim’s diaries seem to be more focused on his goal of developing new business. He claims that he values teamwork and does mention it fairly frequently, but this is more in terms of how he gets support from his own colleagues and peers. He only once refers to his own team (of which he is the manager). This is in response to feedback which highlights his lack of support for the team. Despite this criticism, Tim does not go out of his way to build teamwork in his team and it is not referred to again in his diary. Tim seems to manifest the pattern of someone whose attention is very much focused

on his own goals. He does not seem to think very explicitly about values. Tim never uses the word 'values' in the diaries and tends not to question his own values. He does not refer to 'values' at all in either the first interview or the second. Tim's values are more self-oriented than idealistic (profile and recognition; making a difference) and they operate in a very similar manner to goals. Tim appears to be an archetypal utilitarian, whilst Bill is a deontologist!

This reveals an important difference in how we orient ourselves towards our values. It also reveals an important difference in the roles that values play, psychologically speaking. There is a difference between values that are based on our personal needs, and values that are culturally acquired. The point is that many values can also be psychological 'needs'. Freshwater and Robertson list some basic needs: survival, love, security, respect, independence, power, sexuality (2002:52). Reese lists some basic values: survival, love, security, self-respect, individuality, strength, meaningful and meaningless sex (2000: 24). The overlap between values and needs (or 'drives' or 'motivations') does not seem to be widely explored in the psychological literature. However, it is important for this research as I refer to both values and goals. If security is both a goal and a value, the very concept of value is undermined. Security as a 'value' is transformed into a goal selfishly pursued by the individual. Of course we are entering the heart of the debate between deontologists and utilitarians, something that is not appropriate here. What I am doing is simply drawing attention to the considerable overlap and confusion around terminology whilst at the same time trying to distinguish between the functional properties of values when viewed as part of a psychological system.

I feel that for the purposes of this research it might be important to distinguish between values that operate as personal motivators or needs and those that are more idealistic and hence involve some sense of potential 'sacrifice'. Some values are what I shall refer to as 'motivational'. These are values that operate as day-to-day motivators or needs and may tend to operate in a manner similar to goals. Examples might include 'security', 'status', 'wealth', 'success'. The second set of values operate more as 'ideals'. People may take them for granted, or they may support them in indirect ways (belonging to a political party or pressure group, for example) but idealistic values do not operate in the same way as motivational values do. They



tend to be more akin to beliefs rather than goals. Examples of 'idealistic' values might include 'equality', 'justice', 'freedom', 'peace'.

Motivational values are relevant to self-esteem. We need them to be affirmed by the people around us and by the world we inhabit as this affirmation is essentially an affirmation of who we are.

Idealistic values that are often culturally acquired are quite different. In many cases they conflict with our desires and goals and this brings into play an additional complexity to the learning process. Christian values, for example, encourage us to love our neighbour and not to judge others. We are advised to give to others, to look after the poor and sick, not to commit adultery and not to lie! All this is fine, if we have natural propensities to do this anyway but for most people this would require intense restraint and inhibition of one's needs.

This generates two underlying needs with regards to values. The first need is to surround ourselves with people who affirm our motivational values and by affirming them, affirm us. If we find ourselves amongst people who agree with our behaviours and our judgements this helps us to derive a sense that we are good people who are valued by others. This helps to boost our self esteem.

The second need underlying values is the need to behave consistently with our idealistic or learned values. These are the values that often conflict with our goals or at the very least that we tend to neglect. When we compromise our goals for the sake of our idealistic values we say we have behaved with integrity. When we compromise our values for our goals we can be said to have behaved unscrupulously or cynically or pragmatically. The need to behave with integrity, to see ourselves behaving consistently with our idealistic moral code is also very important.

The first need is to have our values affirmed by others for the sake of our self esteem. The second need is to behave with integrity. This varies in strength amongst individuals however. For some it is an important part of their self esteem; for others not so.

People seem to focus attention upon and learn from cues that challenge their motivational values and this is linked with how learning relates to self esteem (see below). However some people also focus attention on and learn from cues that challenge their sense that they or the people around them are behaving with integrity.

### ***6.3.iii The Role of Emotions***

Perhaps the most noticeable aspect of the diarists' attention pattern is the strong dominance of 'feelings'. In the case of SS 'feelings' got 330 mentions followed by 'my role/career' with 117. In the case of LL, 'feelings' got 300 mentions followed by 'peers' with 93. This is hardly surprising since 'feelings' represent a very broad category, encompassing innumerable feeling states and moods. It is also inevitable since we experience feelings in conjunction with every cue and every learning domain. The feeling states are often associated with the other triggers mentioned in this section (goals, values, self esteem, problems and challenges). We have already seen how anger and guilt are associated with violations of our values. Blocks to our goals are associated with anger, disappointment, frustration, anxiety and despair and facilitators of our goals with elation, excitement, optimism, happiness:

“I really couldn't understand what was going on. Surely if I had been that close to getting the job then how could I now not be suitable after all my GM stated himself that this was the hardest decision he has ever had to make. Any positive feelings I had now started to reduce quickly and dropped lower over the transition stage” (Will Payne, February)

“get really excited when I'm in my interest “domain”. The “I can do this” times.” (Alex Grey, year end review)

“I feel like I'm being asked to join projects last minute/afterthought....doesn't improve my feeling that my deployment and career development are just after thoughts. Not a good month” (Carys Sale, January)

“met some nice new people on course. Better friendship with colleague too. This is nice. Feel like I'm getting to know people well and enjoy it” (Carys Sale, July)

“A chance to elaborate my ideas for a “Risk Scale” at the highest level. A number of difficulties are highlighted to me. I did get downhearted during the meeting then later on I could see a strategy which may lead to success.

LESSON - “Revolutionary ideas usually suffer set backs but keep on keeping on!” (Mat Steele, March)

“I do, as I’ve found out in the last two weeks, I still do enjoy very satisfying, solving a problem that’s been niggling at me for a long time, finally get it done, sorted, understood. It’s a great feeling” (Paul Richards, i/v 1)

Emotions are pervasive, but that is not the point here. What we are interested in is how emotions operate to trigger deep learning and they appear to do this in a number of ways:

- ◆ uncomfortable emotions need to be processed and cleared (e.g. guilt, anger)
- ◆ positive emotions may generate a desire to replicate the experience
- ◆ certain emotions seem to have direct links to sensemaking – curiosity, wonder, surprise, shock. I have called these the cognitive emotions as they express a disconfirmation of expectation.

In all three cases the individual’s first experience of the need for sensemaking is the experience of an emotion that needs to be processed.

### ***Uncomfortable Emotions***

Kay experiences guilt at the beginning of the year and she continues to make sense of the incident throughout the year. Bill experiences guilt and feels the urge to make amends to his team members. Will experiences anger at the frustration of his goals and goes into deep sensemaking in order to give him some understanding over what has happened to him. Jim Barnes feels the need to make a presentation in order to:

***“finally purge it from my system you know, and get rid of it, and so I did feel happier afterwards, I felt as though, right that’s it, that’s the end of it and***

we've done our best out of it, not only in terms of closing it out properly but also in letting people know what sort of problems we encountered, and what signs there are to look out to so they can try to avoid them in the future." (Jim Barnes, i/v 2)

All of these people are driven in their learning to purge themselves of uncomfortable emotions. However, as we have seen, sometimes uncomfortable emotions also operate to block sensemaking. Jim Barnes experiences uncomfortable emotions earlier on in the year and does not go into sensemaking mode. In fact his diary entries stress how he could have done "nothing differently". Ann and Mat, as we have both seen, dismiss information that makes them feel uncomfortable (although the discomfort has drawn their attention it has not triggered deep sensemaking). It may be that a tolerance of discomfort is something that differs amongst individuals; it also may depend upon the degree of discomfort and the duration (i.e. will a surface dismissal of the cues eradicate the discomfort or will that discomfort remain?). In Ann's case the feedback she was given was not part of the workplace system (it was a private discussion between her and me). Hence, it did not recur as a problem and her surface sensemaking seemed to operate effectively (even though the problem remained, it was not visible to Ann!). For Mat, the dismissal of the project overspend did recur and he was forced to face it and make sense of it as part of his job. The guilt that Jim Barnes, Kay Mendes and Bill Fineman experience seems to linger and needs to be processed and made sense of before it can be expurgated. Perhaps Paul Richards shows us a good example of the complex dynamics at play here. He talks of how he felt completely demotivated at work:

"I'd been feeling like that for a long time but I suppose I eventually started thinking, well look. The original plan was always, as with what normal people perhaps do, is to say right I'm not happy in this job, I'm going to look for another one, but I just, once I'd left this place in the evening or for the weekend, I'm one of these people that can switch off completely. *Now if this seeming overwhelming uncomfortableness came with me when I did leave in the evening, then maybe I would have done something about it in the evening or at the weekend, but I didn't because once I'd left this place, I no longer had that overwhelming motivation to do something about it,* and so

that's why, for quite a long time, perhaps it's been building up and yet as soon as I go out of this place it was, I had lots of other things on that were higher priority in the short term, were higher priority" (Paul Richards, i/v 2)

Paul makes it quite clear that he was prepared to tolerate a high degree of frustration simply because he could 'switch off' once he had left work. The motivation to make sense of the discomfort, face it and act comes from the strength, duration and *intrusion* of the 'uncomfortableness' (does it affect life outside work? Is it transitory? Can I live with it?). However, there are probably other forces operating here. We have seen that emotions can act both as forces for learning and forces against it and in Paul's case they both appear to be battling for dominance. The force against learning is probably the fear of change – Paul knows that once he engages in deep sensemaking the prospect of having to move will have to be faced (he has been with his organisation for over 20 years). However the force for learning is the desire to be rid of the 'overwhelming uncomfortableness'. The latter however, was not intrusive enough in his life to overcome the anxiety associated with the former. A third force is also probably at play here in that Paul is afraid to acknowledge that he is not good at his job (his current way of making sense of his situation). In fact it is only once a new construct has been introduced to him (around personality preference and job fit) that he gains the impulse to address his situation and go into deep sensemaking mode (for a closer analysis of this dynamic see Paul's learning biography).

### *Positive Emotions*

Positive emotions play an intriguing role in learning. On the one hand they can spur it and on the other they can inhibit it. Looking specifically at how they trigger sensemaking we can see that on the one hand they cause us to make sense of the events around us in order to seek further such experiences. On the other hand, they can reflect an aversion to discomfort, a tendency to over-emphasise the good at the expense of what did not work so well, a tendency to make sense of things in order to generate positive emotions at the expense of more painful insights.

Charles shows us how positive emotions can trigger sensemaking. He begins to forge a close, personal and profitable relationship with some clients and his attention is

drawn to it. Firstly he is struck by how unusual the relationship is (mainly because it is enjoyable and profitable). The emotions stirred here are more akin to curiosity and surprise:

“and they come down for meetings and we’ve actually been, myself and Tim, have been out and chatted with them socially, you know just drinking, had a meal, had a drink and it’s very enjoyable, they’re the type of people that I would like to be out socially with. It’s a very odd relationship actually because they tend to throw money at us at the moment and we’ve quite happy to accept it and there’s no need to tender for work and things, we sort of their preferred customer...so it is a very interesting relationship actually, very odd, not something that is typical of, I don’t think, within the company...it allows us to make a lot better profit on the work, so I don’t think it’s typical” (1<sup>st</sup> interview)

However, the relationship matures and the positive feedback at work that Charles experiences as a result, cause him to focus more and more on the relationship. In fact this becomes one of Charles’ main learning domains and generates some of the most important learning outcomes of the year:

“We are still getting very positive feedback from BEG and they seem more than happy to give us additional work. Its good to have a satisfied customer. It seems to me that a major reason for our success with BEG is that Tim and myself get on very well with JB, the BEG project manager. This again emphasises that in business its far easier to get repeat work out of an existing customer than it is to win business from new customers. Hence spending some effort on gaining the trust of a customer and ensuring you deliver exactly what he wants will pay dividends in the long run.” (January)

Here we can see that Charles is analysing his successful relationship and drawing meaning from the experience in order to guide future action . This is a clear example where someone invests time in making sense of a successful and positive experience.

Tim is a good example of someone who prefers to learn through positive experiences. Tim was one of the few respondents who I was able to contact to give me feedback

on my learning biography. Under the section ‘What were the most valid parts of the analysis?’ Tim wrote: “tends to analyse positive emotions more readily than negative ones”, thus validating the above commentary.

In Tim’s case we see an example of someone who appears to avoid learning from negative experiences and prefers to learn from positive experiences ONLY. This preference might be seen as a sort of defence mechanism – enabling learning but avoiding the pain associated with learning.

We will explore this theme more fully in the next section that explores the dynamics involved in sensemaking. For now we can see that positive emotions can act as a trigger to learning in a number of ways – focusing attention on something that is working in an attempt to analyse the ‘recipe’ for success; or focusing attention on something that is working in order to provide positive emotional support.

### *The Cognitive Emotions – Shock, Surprise, Curiosity*

I have called these the cognitive emotions because they imply some form of ‘cognitive expectation’ about the world that has been disconfirmed or interrupted in some way. Weick quotes Meryl Louis:

“Sense making can be viewed as a recurring cycle comprised of a sequence of events occurring over time. The cycle begins as individuals form unconscious and conscious anticipations and assumptions, which serve as predictions about future events. Subsequently, individual experience events that may be discrepant from predictions. Discrepant events, or surprises, trigger a need for explanation or post-diction, and correspondingly, for a process through which interpretations of discrepancies are developed.” (Louis quoted in Weick, 1995:4)

Surprise is indeed often a trigger for sensemaking:

“I was quite intrigued by my personal feelings during the presentation which were to be protective to my customer rather than supportive of other people

within my own company. When Tim rejoined us later he also made the same point to me. I think this stems from the fact that we have such a good working relationship with ABC that we do not want any ‘outsiders’ messing it up for us.” (Charles King, February)

“I was really surprised – he even praised me (in an indirect way). My opinion of him quite changed” (Alex Gray, May)

“It was and it happened very early on so it was good for me. And that changed me completely, **strange, really strange**, because I don’t know where I picked up this issue (his prejudice) with ST, obviously by something I picked up from other people because I don’t interact with him. (Rob Tyler i/v 2, referring to same incident)

“and I think one of the things that **horrified** me a little bit was we did a major presentation at the end of the job to the customer and everybody worked really hard to get this done ....and when I got in the next morning....there was an e-mail waiting for me...to thank everybody for their input and it was one of these things that I thought -well, I’m starting to become too Scientific Solutions like in the way that I operate in that I hadn’t thought about sending an e-mail to the people that had helped me in getting that done and I thought **this is dangerous** because you know I’m obviously getting to the Scientific Solutions way of doing things and that’s not a desirable thing in my view so I made a point of sending out an e-mail to all the people that had helped on the project” (Steve Black, i/v 2)

All of the incidents mentioned above contributed towards significant change in the individuals concerned. In all cases the experience of surprise triggers some deep sensemaking that leads to changes in self concept, in behaviour, in emotional orientation and in constructs.

Hopefully we have shown how emotions operate to trigger deep, transformational sensemaking. What seems to drive people into more transformatory learning is the desire to reach a positive emotional state – a state of emotional well-being. If the



learner is already in a state of dissonance the individual is more likely to engage in deep learning in order to eradicate the dissonance. If a cue generates positive feelings, the learner is more likely to engage in deeper learning in order to attempt to replicate the success. However, if the learner is in a neutral or positive frame of mind and the cue generates negative emotions the learner is more likely to avoid it unless, by doing so, the learner sees other benefits such as the achievement of goals or the enhancement of self esteem.

#### *6.3.iv The Role of Self Esteem*

The final area we will explore briefly is how people's attention is drawn to events that appear relevant to their self esteem and how such events trigger transformational sensemaking. We will cover this briefly because much of what can be said has been already covered. For example, it may be assumed that everyone's goal is to maintain or increase their self esteem (hence the cue is 'goal relevant'). It may also be assumed that anything relevant to self esteem will provoke emotions (hence the cue becomes 'emotional').

According to Weick one of the main characteristics of 'sensemaking' is that it is "grounded in identity construction" (Weick, 1995:18). Goals, values, self-esteem, emotional well-being – all are integral to our sense of identity and all appear to be the main foci of our attention and the main drivers of learning.

At this point then we will provide further evidence of how transformational sensemaking is triggered by events relevant to self concept and self esteem:

"I took my CV along and I was absolutely **knocked over** by the response I got, because I expected to get some - 'yes, we're very interested, we'll put it through the process and we'll see' but I got a very 'wow, gosh we're desperate for people with these sort of skills and these sort of qualifications. So from feeling undervalued by Scientific Solutions plc, **I suddenly saw the contrast between the way I seem to be valued outside** and I got offered interviews for all three jobs' (Steve Black i/v 2)

“Made a special journey to R for this 400 mile round trip for 1 ½ hours because I felt it was really important. (Note: annoyed that S just strolled in and joined it when I’d had to work so very hard to be asked in. Shouldn’t annoy me but he seems to be having everything laid before him whereas it’s taken me 5 years (+) to get this far!!). Hard to get a word in edgeways but managed – stuck with being assertive – made a few good points – one of which was powerful enough to have turned the whole thing around ...he said later he thought I would just shut up because everyone was talking and was impressed I held my ground.

Was it worth it? Yes – **my contribution will ultimately have altered a bit of the culture in an albeit indirect and intangible way.**” (Alex Gray, April)

“Now wondering if I’m getting left out of jobs a bit due to telling him “off”/changed tactics. Also feeling a bit insecure - **was I involved because he wanted me there or because I was good at my job?**” (Carys Sale, December)

“am I worthy to be making these decisions anyway, should I really be the one who’s saying to this other person ‘really you don’t sit there now, you sit down here’” (Bill Fineman, i/v 2)

This is obviously a small sample of all the data relevant to self esteem. However, all that needs to be highlighted at this stage is that events relevant to self-esteem seem to trigger sensemaking. People are more likely to engage in transformational learning if in doing so they maintain or enhance their self esteem. If they feel that their self esteem will be damaged in the sensemaking process they may avoid learning. This may not be the case however, as long as the learning appears to achieve other benefits such as the achievement of goals, the preservation of one’s values or long-term emotional well-being.

\* \* \*

We have so far looked at what seems to generate a willingness to engage in learning as opposed to simple information processing. We have seen that we may be prepared

to engage in deep, transformational learning if it appears to help us achieve our goals, preserve our values system, lead to emotional well-being and enhance self-esteem.

These four areas relate to a number of basic human needs:

- ◆ the need to achieve success through meeting goals
- ◆ the need to predict and control events by understanding ‘what works’ in the world (this is linked to the above need)
- ◆ the need for self esteem
- ◆ the need for integrity or moral consistency – to act in accordance with our values
- ◆ the need for emotional comfort or harmony.

We have already seen that these needs do overlap. Our self esteem in part depends upon accurate prediction of events, successful goal completion and a belief in our moral integrity. However, self esteem also depends upon our believing that we are loved, respected and valued. Happiness or emotional comfort will depend greatly upon whether we can achieve our goals, our level of self esteem, our sense of integrity and our competence in understanding and predicting events. However, happiness also depends upon other things, such as whether we can meet other needs in our work – our need for meaning and purpose for example – whether we have our health or not. So, the extent to which these overlap will, in part, depend upon individual differences and circumstances. Whereas one person will depend greatly for his self esteem upon successful completion of a goal, another will not. One person may rest their self esteem upon a high sense of personal integrity whilst another will not. In part it will also depend upon circumstances – so we may be achieving our goals at work, have a high sense of our personal self worth but not be happy as we are not fulfilling our potential. In this example, it may be the experience of unhappiness that drives our learning. Another person may find themselves in the same situation but will be prepared to suffer the lack of fulfilment because other needs, such as the need for security, are being met. In this case presumably the degree of unhappiness is less. So whilst there is a degree of overlap, the constructs do differ in terms of how they interact and are experienced by individual learners.

This will be seen much more clearly as the analysis unfolds. For now, we hope to have provided enough evidence to support the second organising idea –

what makes people move from simple information processing to ‘learning’ is the need to protect or enhance:

- ◆ goal achievement, including enhancing our understanding of the world
- ◆ self esteem
- ◆ our personal value system
- ◆ personal happiness.

These are the four main drivers of learning. Furthermore, they receive support in different parts of the literature. Weick (1995) quotes Erez and Earley:

“the establishment and maintenance of identity is a core preoccupation in sensemaking...Erez and Earley (1993) argue ...The processes that develop and maintain a person’s changing sense of self are posited to operate in the service of three self-derived needs: (1) the need for self-enhancement, as reflected in seeking and maintaining a positive cognitive and affective state about the self; (2) the self-efficacy motive, which is the desire to perceive oneself as competent and efficacious; and (3) the need for self-consistency, which is the desire to sense and experience coherence and continuity. (p.28) It is the ongoing fate of these needs that affects individual sensemaking in organizations” (1995:20)

Vince (1996) quotes Claxton’s four personal defence systems:

“I must be *Competent*

I must be *Consistent*

I must be *In control*

I must be *Comfortable*

The need to feel competent, consistent, in control and comfortable for ourselves and with others sets a boundary around our capacity to learn and change. This boundary is built as a protection against anxiety and

uncertainty, a protection against the unfamiliar” (Vince, 1996: 113, his italics).

Argyris maintains that single loop learning is governed by four variables: 1) achieve the purpose as the actor defines it; 2) win, do not lose; 3) suppress negative feelings; 4) emphasize rationality.

There is an astonishing degree of overlap in these categories both in terms of content but also in terms of the *number* of influencing variables that appear to be important (i.e. 3 or 4):

<i>This Research</i>	<i>Claxton</i>	<i>Erez and Earley</i>	<i>Argyris</i>
Goals	I must be in control	Self efficacy	Achieve the purpose as the actor defines it
Self esteem	I must be competent	Self enhancement Self efficacy	Win, don't lose
Psychological comfort	I must be comfortable	Self consistency	Suppress negative feelings Emphasize rationality
Values	I must be consistent	Self consistency	Emphasize rationality

It would appear that the research has uncovered something that has echoes elsewhere in the literature but which has not received prominence in the discourses or debates.

#### ***6.4 Finding Three: The Context of Learning and Five Mental States That Influence the Learning Process.***

The above analysis of emotions, values, goals and self esteem points out certain consistencies in people's learning patterns. However, as I was trying to explore these consistencies it became apparent that there were different clusters of diarists – with some patterns applying more clearly to one cluster than another.

The most obvious difference was apparent between one set of people who seemed highly energised and excited about their learning and another set who were deeply unhappy.

In the first set were people such as Kay Mendes (at the beginning of the year), Jim Eddy, Bill Fineman and Mat Steele.

In the second set were Alex Gray, Paul Richards, Sally Peters, Steve Black, Kay Mendes (at the end of the year), Carys Sale and Will Payne.

Looking at these two sets more closely it was clear that the first set comprised people who were leading change. Each of them had a vision and had the power and opportunity to introduce the changes they needed to achieve it. They were trying to change the world around them to fit their preferences, values and goals.

The second group comprised people who were having to adapt to changes that someone else had introduced. These changes were not in line with their values, goals and preferences, hence all of them, to a greater or lesser extent, had to adapt to situations that were not supportive of their needs. All of those in the second group experienced profound challenges to their self esteem and were deeply unhappy with the situation in which they found themselves. They also were highly aware of the limitations to their power to influence events around them.

A third group seemed to lie in between. They were having to adapt to changes being brought in by others but the changes were not grossly out of line with their own

personal goals and values. They willingly attempted to make the changes and seemed to be coping adequately. They were highly focused in their learning however wanting to ensure they did not fail in their new tasks. Most of their learning was based upon having to learn new behaviours e.g. selling, and hence they learned by experimenting with slight changes in behaviour to see what worked.

The last two types of learning were not central to this study. Firstly, we have intrinsic learning where people learn simply for the love of the learning process or for the desire for mastery that the learning brought them.

Lastly, we have incidental learning which is learning picked up as a by-product of another experience.

We will look at these in more detail.

#### ***6.4.i Visionary Learning***

I described the first learning state as ‘visionary’ learning. This is where people are prepared to open their construing in pursuit of a vision. A vision is unlike a goal in that it is focused on transforming the world as opposed to simply transforming one’s personal situation. It is an end in support of personal values as opposed to an end in the pursuit of a personal career goal, such as promotion or job security. As a result it instils a slightly different state of mind – a passionate commitment, a belief that what you are doing is ‘right’ and ‘good’ not only for yourself but for ‘the business’. It involves an acceptance of the need to change ‘hearts and minds’, a sort of ‘fighting’ mentality (we see a lot of ‘fighting’ imagery used in such circumstances). There is a belief that one is fighting for a set of values, quite often against an alternative set of values. Also it involves a wider attention span. When one is pursuing a personal career goal, one’s attention span tends to be focused purely on ‘how to get the job done – what works’ and ‘what do influential people think of me’. When one is pursuing a vision one’s attention span is spread more widely – focusing on the ‘stakeholders’ in the vision, their feelings, attitudes and behaviours, the necessary changes in systems and processes, political support, obstacles and impediments, culture and values. The more one is pursuing a vision rather than a goal, the more one’s attention goes beyond a simple concern with one’s own performance. When in

this frame of mind, visionary learners appear to be voracious learners – eager to understand what works, take risks, change their behaviour, change constructs. It is an exciting energising experience<sup>8</sup>. Visionary learning is, needless to say, rare. Only one of our diarists exhibits it completely and that is Jim Eddy. However, Mat Steele and Kay Mendes do exhibit signs of it as well.

There are downsides to visionary learning and this often stems from the lack of focus on the self. The visionary learner is often keen to change everything and everyone except him or herself! The passionate belief in one's own rightness based upon a personal set of values can mean that one is blind to how one's own behaviour lacks effectiveness and sometimes integrity. Because the visionary learner is often in a position of power and influence, she or he is not forced to face challenges to their self esteem that other learners in the organisation have to face.

#### ***6.4.ii Dissonant Learning***

The second state was described as dissonant learning. This is because this learning state is characterised by confusion, mixed messages and self doubt. Dissonant learning tends to take place when people are having to adapt to changes other people are bringing in that does not support their values, skills, goals and/or self esteem.

People in this state see things that they value being eroded. They feel that they are not valued themselves as they have to adopt goals and behaviours that they do not like. Their old skills and ways of working are dismissed and their self esteem is gradually eroded. They are confused as to what is going on – are they really no longer any use to the organisation, are they no longer competent or is it that the organisation has changed for the worse? Is it they who are at fault or is it the people and organisation around them? Do they really have to change their value set and behaviours or should they move on to find a new job? Would it be different elsewhere or are similar changes taking place everywhere? What is really happening? Why are they unhappy? How can they regain self esteem and happiness when everything they believed in has changed and what used to work no longer does? The state of dissonant learning is characterised by intense confusion and self doubt.

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<sup>8</sup> See Jim Eddy's biography for a description of classic visionary learning.



People experiencing dissonant learning often experience the most profound and transformational learning. This is because the world around them has changed and they have to re-learn the rules for survival. So they are left wondering: ‘what works around here?’. Often their goals are no longer viable so they are left wondering: ‘what do I want?’. Their values are dismissed so they are left wondering: ‘what is right and good – are they or am I right?’. Their self esteem plummets and they can lose faith in their own construal process<sup>9</sup>. It is almost as if they have to re-learn everything from scratch. And the biggest challenge is understanding the extent to which their ways of relating to the world are ‘right’ or whether their values and beliefs have been legitimately superseded and they need to discard much of what they have invested their identity in.

Dissonant learning is often triggered by a persistent failure to meet goals and needs. As a result it involves intensely painful emotions especially those of anger, self-doubt, loss and depression. The long term, persistent and deep rooted unhappiness eventually becomes so intrusive it forces the learner to address deep questions of change and identity.

It is clear that the dynamics of learning in these two states differ. Whilst the visionary learner is willing and eager to change in order to achieve his or her vision (up to a point!) the dissonant learner is confused, disoriented and sometimes on the verge of a breakdown<sup>10</sup>. Further learning in the dissonant state can achieve sensory overload and further erosion of self esteem. It is clear that defensiveness for the dissonant learner is, at least in part, a necessary self-protective mechanism.

#### ***6.4.iii. Adaptive Learning***

This is probably the most familiar state to be in. Adaptive learning is different from visionary learning. As we have pointed out, visionary learning involves asking the question – ‘what do I need to do in order to achieve a vision that involves the transformation of the world around me?’ Adaptive learning involves asking a more delicate and potentially threatening question – ‘what do I need to do to succeed in this

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<sup>9</sup> see Alex Gray’s learning biography

<sup>10</sup> See Will Payne’s description of his ‘boot camp’ experience as a good example of this.

task?'. This is learning undertaken in order to achieve a performance goal. And the learning will tend to be limited to anything that helps in the achievement of this goal. Whilst visionary learning does involve potential failure, adaptive learning involves a more direct experience of failure of personal competence. A vision may fail due to many extraneous circumstances but failure in a task or role is personal and has to do with issues of competence. Hence, there is more of a sense that the learner wants to limit the learning and not push the boundaries too far.

Adaptive learning is also different from the learning that takes place due to dissonance. Dissonant learning involves a series of cues that force you to re-consider issues of key importance to you. The message one receives in the case of dissonant learning is 'I was totally wrong about this and I need to reconsider everything I thought I knew about it'. It often involves intense and deep emotions especially those of pain and depression.

Adaptive learning is much more concerned about 'what type of behaviour works in this situation?'. The type of change that adaptive learning tends to generate is *incremental* change – both in behaviour and in schemas. Hence the nature of the change that takes place during adaptive learning is more circumspect, less radical and less profound. Most of the learning is focused upon behaviour with people making small changes in their behaviour to see what works best in a particular context. The changes that take place in schema, if at all, are incremental, involving a more complete, complex and experientially based understanding of the domain under question. However, adaptive learning also tends to generate changes in self concept ('I am competent in this area') and changes in self esteem (more or less confidence).

With adaptive learning, attention is more tightly focused on those areas that have to do with 'personal' success – hence if a leader's success is measured by profit or turnover targets, the leader's attention will be tightly focused on the levers that generate change in those areas. It is often only when the personal performance question has been successfully resolved that the leader feels able to broaden their attention to other matters.

Of course we are all involved in adaptive learning, often trying to prove our competence in complex changing circumstances. But when this becomes the prime concern of a manager or leader (as in trying to prove oneself following a promotion, or facing the likelihood of failure) it can generate a distinctive psychological state of mind. The following characteristics may be observed in a situation of intense adaptive learning:

- ◆ narrow focus on one or two key performance learning domains
- ◆ narrow focus on one's personal performance
- ◆ higher readiness to engage in targeted behaviour change (making incremental changes to see what works best)
- ◆ willingness to engage in transformational sensemaking only to the extent that it supports performance goals
- ◆ the clear presence of 'blind spots' or areas where the learner does not wish to expend energy.

#### **6.3.iv *Intrinsic Learning***

Intrinsic learning is the opposite of adaptive learning. People engage in intrinsic learning for two reasons:

- ◆ the love of the learning process itself (e.g. the enjoyment involved in attending courses; the enjoyment of mastering a skill)
- ◆ the desire to enjoy the outcome of the learning for its own sake – not for the achievement of a career or functional goal (e.g. the desire to learn a musical instrument; the desire to produce an outstanding meal; the desire to be able to ski along with one's friends).

This research does not devote much attention to intrinsic learning of this sort, simply because it is focused very much on learning in the workplace and there are few examples of intrinsic learning in the workplace (at least that are recorded in the diaries). Even amongst professionals, who might be assumed to be passionately interested in their subject, the majority of the learning was oriented towards specific work goals – from success in a role, to happiness or even survival at work. Maybe

because the period under study involved intense change and hence, for many, potential threat, most of the learning involved adaptive (survival), visionary or dissonant learning. It was rare to see someone really enjoy learning for its own sake in the work environment (although we have one or two examples of this outside the workplace).

In a way, intrinsic learning can be the opposite of dissonant learning. With intrinsic learning one experiences a sense of power, enjoyment and excitement as one gains a sense of mastery, control and personal growth. We also see this in an entry from Paul Richards diary:

“A real Eureka moment. Finally understand every step of a complex set of mathematical/statistical manipulations which deals with the uncertainty inherent when reading reactor temperatures and which has been puzzling me for 12 months. **I bask in a warm glow of satisfaction.** Even during the evening away from work the thought flashes through my mind. Of course the challenge now is to write it up so that everyone can understand it...whilst its still fresh in my mind....but other priorities loom  
\*persistence and patience pays...eventually” (May diary)

One could question whether this is real intrinsic learning as it is aimed at solving a work-related puzzle. It is clear that sometimes intrinsic and adaptive learning can overlap but Paul gains no career progression or recognition for solving this problem – it is never mentioned again. He has done this for his own personal interest and interest in the problem. And it is the intrinsic interest in the problem that has driven his “persistence and patience” and the eventual solution to the problem (and hence new schema).

It seems apparent that intrinsic learning has different dynamics from adaptive, visionary and dissonant learning. People are driven to develop new schemas in the areas that they have an intrinsic interest in<sup>11</sup>. Their love of their subject drives them to attend to, investigate, research, experiment, reflect and generally make sense of the phenomena that has caught their curiosity. They will learn beyond what is necessary

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<sup>11</sup> They may also be driven to change schemas in these areas but the diaries show no evidence of this.

to guarantee job or career success (adaptive learning) and, similar to visionary learning, they are often more interested in mastering the subject than worrying about their own personal success or failure. There is a certain lack of self consciousness with intrinsic learning. Again, similar to visionary learning, it is associated with fun, excitement, personal satisfaction and fulfilment.

#### **6.4.v *Incidental Learning***

The final area where we see the development of new schemas is during what I will term 'incidental learning'. Incidental learning is any learning that is absorbed almost as a by-product of other activities. It is learning that is developed despite having no intention to learn. For example, when you go on holiday to a new country you do not necessarily go intending to 'learn' all about the customs of that country. You may go simply to get some sun and to relax. However, despite yourself, you will learn many new things about that country and begin to build a new schema whether you intend to or not. In this case, the new schema of the country concerned is incidental learning – learning picked up as a by-product of going on holiday.

\* \* \* \* \*

So far then we have described five different learning states that appear to differ according to a number of different dimensions. We can see this more clearly on the following table:

## Five Different Learning States and their Characteristics

	<b>Visionary</b>	<b>Dissonant</b>	<b>Adaptive</b>	<b>Intrinsic</b>	<b>Incidental</b>
<b>Typical mood or emotional backdrop</b>	Excited Impatient Desirous of change Anxious about risk – will it work?	Depressed Unsure Unhappy Loss of self esteem	Cautious Receptive	Enthusiastic	Interested Curious Open
<b>Goals</b>	Change the world in line with my values and beliefs	To achieve emotional well-being by finding an environment that supports identity	*Success *Adapting to change *Understanding what works and repeating it	Mastery Enjoying the process	No particular learning goals
<b>Attitude to learning</b>	* Open to learning regarding how to change others/things * Impatient for others to change. * Less receptive to accepting personal change	Confused – knows that learning is needed to resolve confusion but is frightened of learning in a way that generates despair and loss of hope	Ready to learn anything that will help them generate the recipe for success  More resistant to learning that does not seem relevant to goals	Open  Receptive to anything that furthers knowledge and/or mastery  voracious learner	Passive  Will focus learning on things that arouse curiosity or interest  learning is a by-product
<b>Typical Learning outcome</b>	Change in constructs, behaviour and emotional orientation to others and things Less change in self concept, personal behaviour	Either profound transformation  Or depression, breakdown, giving up, defensive withdrawal	Slight changes in behaviour, constructs and emotional orientation  Slight changes can accumulate over time to generate deeper change	Mastery of an area  Lots of experiments  Changes in behaviour, constructs and emotional orientation	Loss of interest, forgotten  or  interest is aroused and learning evolves into visionary or adaptive learning

We can change our learning states according to the learning domain or according to circumstance. Kay for example, starts off the year in visionary learning mode and ends it in dissonant mode. We may be visionary learners when it comes to an area we feel passionate about and adaptive learners when it comes to an area we feel indifferent about.

Still, it is useful to remember that not everyone's experience of learning and change is the same and even whilst we are making generalisations regarding how people learn we need to remember that whilst learning is exciting for people leading change (as long as they do not have to change in ways that challenge their self esteem!) it can be devastating for the people having to adapt to it.

\* \* \*

This then is our third finding and organising idea. We will find that in the subsequent chapters learning is analysed according to the mental or learning state. Hence when looking at how people change their schemas we shall look separately at how people change their schemas according to whether they are experiencing visionary, dissonant, adaptive, intrinsic or incidental learning.

## 6.4 Conclusion

Where then does this leave our three organising ideas?

We started the chapter by identifying the four processes that appeared vital to all learning. These were:

- ◆ paying attention to a cue (in Gestalt terms - selecting a 'figure' from the 'ground')
- ◆ experiencing an emotion that acts as a catalyst for further reactions or responses
- ◆ making sense of experience – attributing meaning to the cue
- ◆ taking action based upon any or all of the above.

However what distinguished learning from information processing was the effort expended at change at each of the four transition points. The learning cycle then has to involve at least one of the following processes:

***attentional learning***: focusing one's mental and emotional resources upon new or different cues or changing the quality of one's mental and emotional focus upon familiar cues

***emotional learning*** : the experience of a new or different emotion in relation to a cue

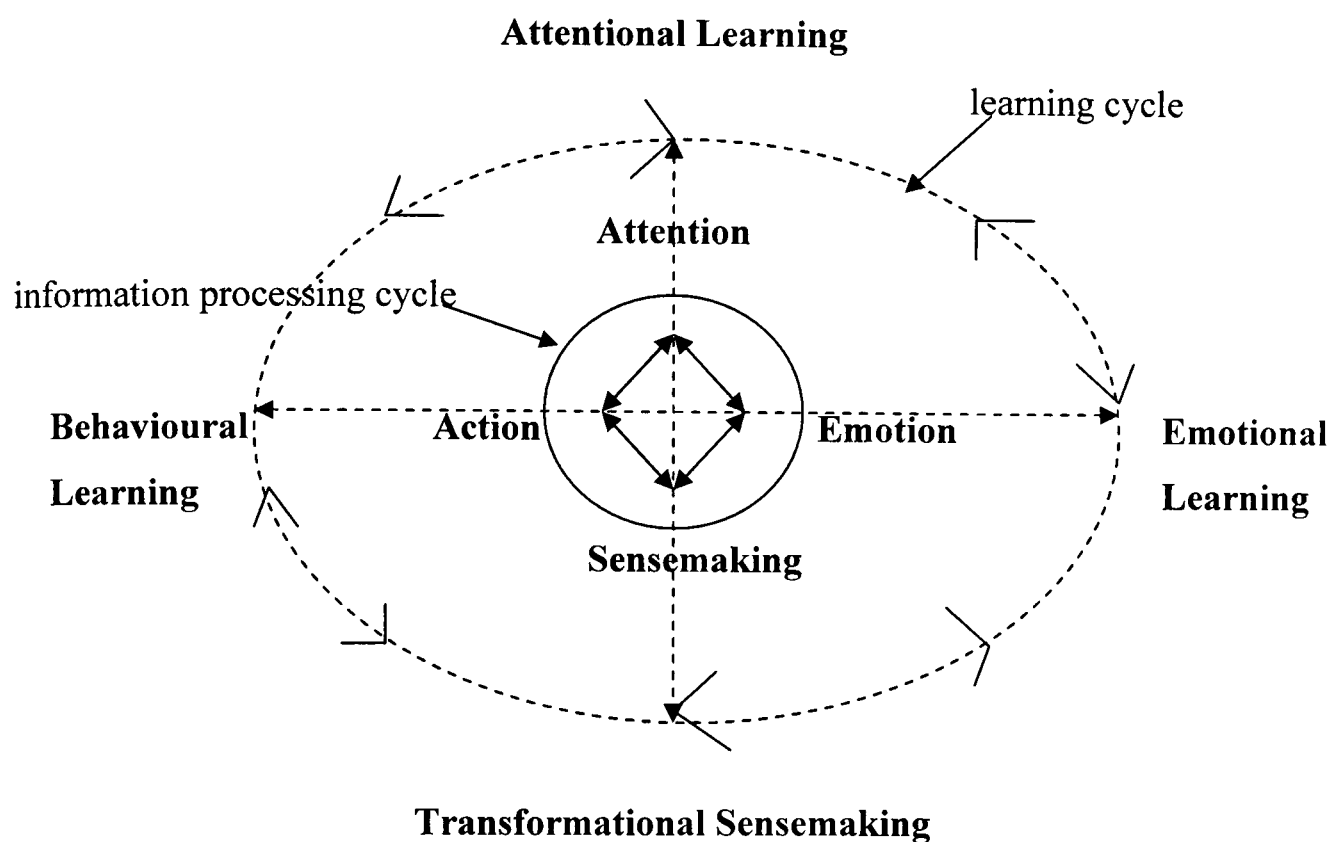
***transformational sensemaking***: the development of new or changed meaning by the application to a cue of new or different constructs, schemas or paradigms

***behavioural learning***: generating new or changed behaviours in response to a cue.....

.....all of which generates further emotions, questions, needs or actions which in turn lead to changes in emotional orientation, constructs or behaviour.

The learning cycle was then depicted as follows:





Learning could begin or end anywhere on either cycle as long as the outer cycle is involved at some stage. There is also a sense that learning need never stop.

However, it takes effort and will to stay on the outside circle and once learning begins neither the outcomes nor the process can be predicted. Hence there is always a degree of uncertainty, anxiety and sheer effort involved in learning.

The distinction between learning and information processing left an important question:

‘why would someone bother putting effort into change and learning at each of the transition points, especially if they felt they could get away with simple information processing?’

In attempting to answer this question we identified four important drivers of learning:

- i. the need to achieve my goals including the need to understand ‘what works’ in the world
- ii. the need to preserve, protect and enhance my values
- iii. the need to achieve emotional well-being

iv. the need to preserve, protect and enhance my self esteem

It appeared that when we needed to protect or promote our goals, values, emotional well-being and/or self esteem we would be more likely to engage in the difficult task of learning. These were the areas that dominated the learning diaries and in which most of the learning outcomes were generated. We found that if the learner is already in a state of dissonance regarding any of the above needs or goals, s/he is more likely to engage in deep learning in order to eradicate the dissonance, depending, of course, upon how intrusive the dissonance is. If the learning appeared to threaten deep needs such as self esteem, many people would tolerate high levels discomfort (e.g. blocked goals) rather than have to face the prospect of questioning the self (thereby generating even greater discomfort).

Whilst this appeared to be generally the case, however, it did seem to depend upon the type of learning state we were engaged in. This brought in the final five learning states that seemed to mediate our readiness to engage in tough, transformational learning. A visionary learner was keen to engage in a broad base of learning if it helped her to achieve her vision; an adaptive learner was ready to learn new behaviours and constructs if they related to a specific performance goal – adaptive learners were keen to establish personal success and avoid failure. Dissonant learning involved a threat to goals, values, self-esteem and emotional well-being. This generated an ambivalent attitude towards learning – keen to avoid threatening learning but ready to take on learning if it meant the eradication of the dissonance and the clarification of the situation. Intrinsic learning was undertaken for the joy of learning and therefore people were willing to learn anything in relation to their area of interest and incidental learning occurred as a by-product of another experience.

The three ideas we have elaborated here will provide a basis for the analysis and structuring of the following three chapters. These will look in more detail at what generates new and changed constructs, emotional orientations and behaviours. Throughout these chapters we will regularly refer to the four key learning processes (attentional learning, emotional learning, transformational sensemaking and behavioural learning), the four main drivers of learning and the five different learning states.

## **Chapter 7. How People Change Their Schemas When Going Through Change – Detailed Application of Model - I**

The next three chapters break learning down into its constituent components – schemas, emotional orientation and behaviour. Chapter 7 will look at how we change our schemas. Chapter 8 will look at how we change our emotional orientation. Chapter 9 will look at how we change our behaviour. We will use the ideas in chapter six to structure and support the findings, hopefully demonstrating their utility.

Chapter 7 looks as follows:

- 7.1 Introduction
- 7.2 Dissonance generates changes in schemas
- 7.3 The drive to achieve generates changes in schemas (visionary and adaptive learning)
- 7.4 Changes in Emotional Orientation – How Guilt and Empathy change schemas
- 7.5 Changes in Behaviour generate changes in schema
- 7.6 Summary - How do we change our schemas when going through change?

*(N.B. We regularly quote from the learning biographies in the following chapters. However, when quoting long excerpts these are distinguished from the rest of the text by being presented in italics.)*

## **7.1 Introduction**

We come to the key question behind the inception of this research ‘how do people change their schemas when experiencing change in their environment?’ Perhaps just as interesting is the question of how and why they do not change.

We have seen so far that learning, as opposed to information processing, is not inevitable. Learning often involves uncomfortable emotions and sometimes people go to great lengths to avoid those emotions. Even when people are in ‘sensemaking’ mode, they do not necessarily make sense of cues in the most effective or creative ways. If it appears that we can get away with it, we might be sorely tempted to use our sensemaking to ‘explain away’ the discrepant or uncomfortable cues. So under what circumstances will we ‘face the music’? Under what circumstances will we face the discomfort and pain involved in changing our constructs? Are there instances when change does not involve pain but rather entails joy and excitement? Is it possible to enjoy changing our constructs?

In order to answer these questions the data collated from the diaries has been clustered under the following headings (based upon the different learning states outlined in our previous chapter):

### ***Dissonance can trigger transformational sensemaking***

- ◆ Sudden Disconfirmation – “I was wrong”
- ◆ Gradual Disconfirmation/increase in dissonance – “Why isn’t this working”

### ***The drive to achieve can trigger transformational sensemaking***

- ◆ Visionary Learning - The Drive to Achieve a Vision
- ◆ Adaptive Learning – The Drive to Achieve a (Performance) Goal

### ***Once engaged in learning prior learning can trigger transformational sensemaking***

- ◆ Changes in Emotional Orientation – Stress, Guilt, Empathy and More
- ◆ Changes in Behaviour

## 7.2 *Dissonance generates changes in schemas*

### 7.2.i *Sudden Disconfirmation – “I was wrong”*

Whilst changing our beliefs may be difficult, we *do* change our constructs and one factor that facilitates change is facing an irrefutable disconfirmation of our constructs’ ‘plausibility’<sup>12</sup> (Weick, 1995:57).

We have already seen however, that simple disconfirmation is not an adequate manifestation of the inadequacy of our constructs. Ann Smart receives disconfirmation of her self concept as a manager. Mat Steele receives disconfirmation of his constructs around the spending on a particular project. Both disconfirmations are central to ‘goals’ and ‘self concept’ and hence important psychological adjustments would need to take place if these disconfirmations were to be accepted. Paul claims that once he has accepted a new idea then he has to put his “entire livelihood behind this way of thought” and in addition, build up the “motivation to go through with it”. In Paul’s case this involved the acceptance that after 20 years with the same organisation he needed to leave and took a year’s sabbatical to think about what he was going to do with his life. So, for Paul, a single schema change implied a radical and highly risky change of behaviour with no certainty as to what the outcome would be. It is therefore, no wonder that people do not readily change their core constructs and schemas without significant encouragement or other force for change.

Receiving a sudden **irrefutable** disconfirmation of one’s schema and/or constructs is one such force. However, this rarely happens. Usually there is much leeway in how we construe events and our construal is often driven by a desire not to see change. There are two examples amongst the diarists of irrefutable disconfirmation both of which are associated with extremely high levels of emotion. We shall look at one of them – Will Payne.

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<sup>12</sup> Weick makes the point that the prefix ‘sense’ in sensemaking implies a realist ontology. However, schemas are rarely accurate descriptions of the world nor is this necessarily the most important criterion for the use of a schema. Schemas enable quick, focused, practical action to be taken. Hence “accuracy is nice, but not necessary” (Weick, 1995:56).

Will's example is unusual in that he went through a process almost akin to brainwashing. The following is an excerpt from the learning biography.

**Excerpt from Will Payne's Learning Biography**

*Will's overriding and obsessive goal is to 'get on'. This goal is not simply important to him but reflects a deeply complex relationship he has with his father and a concomitant need to impress him. His main strategy for achieving this is by being 'professional':*

*"Karen And by professionally you mean.....?"*

*Will: The way I put myself across to clients or other managers. I'm very strong at doing it. I can say things that may not be totally true but would sound as if they are and they would believe it. Invariably they happen, not like a lie, what I mean is, I may only be 90% sure if something is going to work, but I would make it sound as if it was a dead cert and they should go with it rather than nothing at all. I think in some ways my arrogance is a very good strength as well because all through it keeps me very firmly rooted on the ground once I've been a bit arrogant, it keeps me going, I don't care what anybody says and I don't think it's a bad thing, its not meant in an arrogant way, its more of a confidence thing, its not meant in an immature way, but you know, they get enough out of me and if it helps me to do that, all well and good, everyone's a winner in my eyes. They need to accept me for what I am." (i/v 1)*

*"I'm very strong when I deal with anybody, not rude or anything, but people know when I talk to them that, they could be a grade 4 or a grade 5, but they know that I'm on an equal with them and that's how it is now. That's helped me now because I'm perceived now as very professional" (i/v 1)*

*Will's notion of 'professional' appears to entail 'presenting oneself as confident, self-assured and certain of his one's own rightness'. And this strategy appears to work for him, in that he achieves very rapid promotion.*

*However, he is asked to join a group of people working for the depot's client, Tesco. The group was divided into teams, each of which had to establish a change target, plan for it and implement it. The change target involved making major savings for the business: Will's team had a target of saving £1.8m, in three months. This was to be achieved by going into a number of depots and identifying savings they could make, gaining the commitment of the GM and his/her team and then making a presentation to the board on the recommendations. Most importantly, Will was made*

*a team leader. This was significant for Will inasmuch as, at the start of the project, it supported his existing self concept and self esteem, especially as he was the only person there who did not work directly for the client:*

*“it was quite good being lead and being stream leader - to me I was to expect it, I went there and I know I’m better than anybody here” (i/v 3)*

*To support them the members of the change teams had a series of top level training programmes designed by external consultants. At the same time everyone received ongoing 360 feedback from team members and other senior personnel with whom they interacted. This would be facilitated by consultants who would also be giving one-to-one feedback, based on observations of the individuals and their interpersonal interactions. Feedback was given to people once a week throughout the project.*

*The teams were given ongoing health checks and each individual was monitored for stress (they were working 12 + hour days at times). What was highly significant about this learning experience was its high centrality for Will –it involved professional development, getting noticed by board members, gaining access to power and the possibility of promotion. So what happened to Will?*

*“I’ve gone through a change of process, but a painful one, because I started to doubt myself, it wasn’t just oh right, like that, it was very much, there was 3 or 4 weeks where I felt so low and these Tesco people that pick you up because they realise that you’ve gone through that, they realise that you have a very, it’s like your comfort factor, you have a comfort factor which is your baseline of the way that you operate, and if you can imagine that, being smashed and you’re falling through, you’re trying to grab hold of something, and partly it took a while to get used to where I was, and what I felt comfortable with” (i/v 3)*

*“Some of the things that people don’t understand is that, these people that were on this project were going in and were shaping a business, they weren’t doing silly little things, it wasn’t like, ‘Oh we’ll do this like this’, it was changing a complete culture of the way Tesco’s were going to operate within a business, and that means we were going into directors and saying, ‘Look you’re not doing this right’. I had a meeting, I actually interviewed three of the Tesco board members about the change process, and it’s the most frightening thing you’ve ever done in your life, they would not let you in unless you had business sense, because they talk a different language.” (i/v 3)*

*It is clear that this has been a highly emotional and challenging process for Will. His defences were stripped away: “it’s like your comfort factor, you have a comfort factor which is your baseline of the way that you operate, and if you can imagine that, being smashed and you’re falling through, you’re trying to grab hold of something”. Later Will uses the term “boot camp” to describe the experience, a boot camp where there is “no place to hide”:*

*“you can’t lie in that kind of environment, you’re dealing with, you’d have a psychiatric or whatever it was, each week we’d be, there was health checks, psychiatric checks, or whatever they were, psychometric tests and everything, analysts, it was like having a shrink on your back each week...and they would analyse everything, professional analysts in business behaviour, you’d bring in this emotional cycle of change and you’re just pinned to every, every path for you is pigeon holed in one of these business professional capability pigeon holes, and you’d be marked on it, they’d bring you up, but with bringing you up, comes acceptability of where you are, and what you feel comfortable with and successful in is completely, you’re told, “this is not good enough” .....And it was the most difficult thing I’ve ever done in my life, it was very painful, and it was like the emotional side was like this, no place to hide, every minute you could be picked, deadlines were aggressive, and it was, my blood pressure was outrageous, you have health checks because of the stress of it. But it was, it had its fun moments as well, it wasn’t brilliant” (i/v 3)*

*The elements of stripping away the defences, of constant observation, feedback and challenge... long working hours, physical exhaustion, “no place to hide” - does indeed have all the hallmarks of a “boot camp”.*

\* \* \*

We can see certain elements in this project that are conducive to construct change. In particular the learning context is highly congruent to Will’s goals and values – this is important to him and not something that he can simply walk away from. His goals, his aspirations and his need to impress his father all depend upon success in this task. Therefore, when he receives ‘feedback’ that his old way of operating does not work in this environment, Will has three choices - change, walk away from the challenge or completely deny the information and face the possibility of failure. The goal congruency of the context would not allow him to walk away from the challenge, so he has the choice that all learners face – accept the feedback and change or continue with the old schemas. What particularly seemed to have facilitated Will’s change is



his dependency on his team and the consultants for his success in what was clearly a mammoth task, with the real possibility of failure. Will did not have the opportunity to continue using his old schema because the other people around him were not cooperating with it. Everyone around him, upon whom he was intensely dependent, refused to confirm his schema. His old schema of appearing professional in order to get on was not working – people were seeing right through the façade and telling him so. If Will was going to be successful in achieving a treasured goal, he would have to change his schema.

We should also not under-estimate the emotional impact of what was happening to Will. In effect his defences were broken down through the onslaught to his self esteem and self concept. The only way he had to build that self esteem up was to cooperate in order to ensure success.

As Will puts it:

“and I’ve learnt more from that than I ever have doing a job, you get more from that than I have from any task or experience that I’ve learnt from doing a job.” (i/v 3)

\* \* \*

It is rare to experience so complete and irrefutable disconfirmation of everything we believe. It is less rare to experience a period of growing dissonance followed by one event that appears to confirm what we had been beginning to fear. We shall see look at this pattern next.

### ***7.2.ii Gradual Disconfirmation & increase in dissonance – “Why isn’t this working”***

Rather more common than a sudden disconfirmation of one’s schema is a gradual weakening of it. In fact, it is very common to find a gradual weakening of one schema and the parallel growth and strengthening of another. We tend to find this occurring when people **persistently** fail to meet their goals or needs. Ann Smart could dismiss aberrant feedback with no repercussions, as the events in question were

not germane to her goals nor did they threaten her values or needs. The feedback was not a problem for her; she could dismiss it and there would be no repercussions. It is only when people fail to achieve their needs and goals that a new mindset establishes itself: 'I have a problem'. In this context then, disconfirmatory feedback undergoes a change of status: no longer is the feedback itself a 'problem', now it is possible 'evidence' to be used in solving or understanding the problem. When people are cognisant of 'owning a problem', their attention processes tend to focus on data that might help to clarify or solve the problem.

Of course all problems do not arise from a failure to meet goals or needs. Some problems are not part of 'core' constructs and hence follow the pattern of incidental or intrinsic learning where learning is either a by-product of doing or is pursued due to a passionate interest in the problem. Problems that have ramifications for identity, self-esteem, goals and values, however, often follow a similar pattern to that set out here – a gradual weakening of existing constructs (as, over time, it is shown that they do not work) together with the parallel growth of more explanatory constructs.

We see this pattern of learning extensively throughout the diaries:

1. The growth of negative emotional states as existing schemas and behaviours do not seem to 'work' in the present environment (by work we mean achieve goals and meet needs)
2. A growing recognition that the problem is not going to disappear. The acceptance of 'ownership' of the problem and recognition of the need to confront it.
3. Transformational sensemaking – intensive learning activity (discursive, vicarious, reflective, practical learning etc.) to generate new schemas that account for what is happening. Attempts to find new schemas may well be driven by other needs apart from explanatory power, however. Needs for self esteem, security, acceptance, emotional well-being etc. will also play a part in shaping the schemas and constructs that emerge. It is at this time that people are most open to change and most fluid in their construct formation. They are searching for schemas that are most plausible, and that most 'work' in terms of meeting their needs.

Let's look at these phases one by one.

- a. *The growth of negative emotional states as existing schemas and behaviours do not seem to 'work' in the present environment (by 'work' we mean achieve goals and meet needs)*

The first stage of transformational sensemaking involving a failure to meet goals or needs is the growth of a negative emotional state that will not go away:

**Ann Smart**

"I feel, that sometimes I just want out and by sort of side tracking into there, am I just trying to escape what I've got here and that's not to say that it's going badly within this department because it's not...but I just don't feel like I'm getting the time to make any changes that are necessary and that I make the impression, as I said in the diary, that I feel I need to make enable just to get myself on...I'm not enjoying it as much as I should do I don't think. Am I using this as an escape?" (i/v 2)

**Alex Gray**

"All this has resulted in me not achieving very much at work, feeling pretty unbalanced and unstable about everything in my "career" and self esteem I've lost sight of what I'm good at, what value I can bring and going through a period of not believing it, even when I can see it" (Alex Gray, February)

**Stave Black**

I was not particularly happy with the sort of work I was doing and I was pretty fed up with it all, I seem to be spending a lot of time and effort earning a lot of money for the company and seeing very little reward for it.

**Paul Richards**

it's more a sort of succession of small things, certainly at work, which were all going in the same direction, all making you less likely to feel motivated working for this organisation, there wasn't a single change that said at the end of it, I would say Oh yes that would make me feel more motivated to work here. They were all in the wrong direction. (i/v 2)

These emotional states are not simply transient responses to setbacks or one-off problems, they are semi-permanent moods that seem to be associated with the workplace (and in particular with the changed workplace). Initially these negative states are attributed to an articulated 'cause' (no time, no work, no leadership, low

self esteem, not being valued, poor pay, lack of enjoyment) but this is prior to any deep sensemaking taking place and is essentially a 'quick and dirty' analysis.

The point about these negative emotional states is that they do not go away. Hence they become 'a problem'.

**b. A growing recognition that the problem is not going to disappear. The acceptance of 'ownership' of the problem and recognition of the need to confront it.**

There is a difference between the diarists describing these negative emotional states and them acknowledging the underlying problem. Acknowledgement of the problem usually comes in the form of a recognition that 'I've got to do something about it'. But it can be a more subconscious process. Diarists sometimes flow from negative emotional state to making sense of the negative emotional state quite subconsciously. On other occasions they make a conscious decision to address the problem by devoting time to it. Prior to this, they might have dismissed the negative state as temporary or unimportant. The quotes below contain my emphases:

#### **Bill Fineman**

"I sit amongst my peers sometimes, people who phone me up regularly for advice and ideas and whatever, and I will sit in front of them at an HR conference and feel I shouldn't be there because I don't really have the education. I don't know really, do you know what I mean. It's crazy. **My objective this year is that I've got to change that, I've got to get that out of my head because I think it's restricting me....**I don't think it's right and I shouldn't feel that way. I know all of that yeah, but that don't stop you feeling it and I don't understand that." (i/v 2)

#### **Kay Mendes**

"Discussed feedback with KB....in some respects for other reasons I've got to the stage where I'm not sure if I really care what or how I'm perceived....**I really do need to take my destiny into my own hands**, as I really do feel like a fish out of water in this business. Oh well, that's my New Year's resolution sorted!" (December)

#### **Carys Sale**

Boring job but very happy to have work. Ultimately left out of follow up for job - again! Feel like I do things (work) then hit a wall. **Must figure out how**

*to get around this* - no clear path to deal with this sort of thing and no feedback. Wonder if I should know how to do this - get more work out of client - but when it does come up - it goes to other consultant (lead) on project and then other consultants get involved = no work for me. No-one is explaining why/how this happens - are they unhappy with my work?

**Ann Smart**

*I think it's made me realise that you do need to have some sort of vision, I can't just keep plodding along and hoping everything is going to turn out ok because changes happen and you've got to be in the best position possible, you've got to put yourself in the best position possible to not fall by the wayside I think that's the changes that have happened over the last year made me realise that and so to enable yourself to be in a good position"* (i/v 2)

Some of these recognitions are part of a flow of learning. Ann's recognition that she now has to devote time and energy to devising a vision for herself comes at the end of a time of profound change (in other areas) for her. Bill's recognition that he has to address his low self esteem also comes at the end of an intense learning period (where he learned about the impact he had on other people's self esteem). For Carys and Kay however, this is an initial realisation that the feelings/problems will not go away and that they will have to confront them head on.

The next stage, as mentioned before, sometimes flows inevitably from the negative feeling state, without a conscious decision on the part of the diarist. On other occasions it is a conscious decision to confront a problem. However arrived at, this is the point where the creativity and change takes place – making sense of the problem.

### *c. Transformational sensemaking – Making Sense of the Problem*

This is the phase in which much creativity in sensemaking takes place. People are very open in their construal processes and are highly receptive to new ideas that will provide a more powerful way of making sense of the situation than their current schemas. However, new schemas are not simply adopted at the expense of the old. They gradually build up and often there is a period when parallel schemas are held and both tested against reality to see which one has more 'plausibility' (see next phase). For now, people are in the stage where they feel their current schemas are not adequately predicting future outcomes (in Weick's terms, things can no longer be

taken for granted) and new schemas, constructs or even whole paradigms need to be developed.

The following are excerpts from Paul Richards' and Carys Sale's learning biographies.

**Excerpt from Paul Richard's Learning Biography**

*It seems as if the key to Paul's change was the realisation that it was not his fault (or failure) that he was not measuring up to the organisation's standards. He changed from thinking that he had to fit the organisation to realising that the organisation did not fit him. Luckily, Paul charts this moment of realisation in his diary:*

*Interview with KB and subsequent discussion with colleague:*

- \* realise that I've never had a good boss - this must have had quite an impact on my career and general development*
- \* realise that there are no role models around anymore. Not a single person in the organisation whose management style, character, ability etc I would unreservedly say is good*
- \* realise that for me a very strong motivation is in trying to emulate suitable role models. If there is no-one then there's no motivation.*
- \* feel a temporary release, or liberation at the confirmation of my increasing realisation of being in the wrong organisation. But still a lot to do if I am to change the situation.*

*A simple question triggered in Paul a sudden shift in his pattern of construal. The question was one I asked all the participants:*

*Karen How would you describe your bosses, how have they influenced you?*

*Paul **Examples of what not to become.** I've not had a single good boss. It's interesting thinking about that, it probably had a big effect on me as well.....they are either **socially inept** people  
....Ideally I think a boss should be the sort of person that you try and emulate in some respects...there must be some qualities about a boss that you want to be inspired by....another couple of people...I would criticise as being just **not giving a firm lead in anything**...what I don't want, is to sit there for hours, listening to something and **waffling** on about something in a totally different direction....basically when you get that sort of interaction with a boss **it modifies your behaviour...you go and see them less and less.** And that's basically the sort of person I've had as bosses.*

*Karen And how do you think that has influenced you then?*

*Paul Well I think probably, thinking about it, it probably had an enormous effect, in terms of probably my career development and progression and maybe the sorts of things I'm doing, and the way in which I'm unable to do or*

*not to do the work or get on with it, I think it's probably had quite a poor effect on all of those aspects. **Talking to you, I've never actually criticised that before.***

*The question gave Paul a new mental model through which to view his situation that resonated with his values (around coaching, mentoring and leadership). Thinking about this for the first time, Paul has had no coaching or leadership over the whole of his career with the organisation (20 years). He also realises that none of the people in positions of leadership inspire his respect. It is hardly surprising then that reflecting on this, Paul begins to feel an "increasing realisation of being in the wrong organisation".*

*So a question gave Paul a new way of interpreting his situation. But if questions did this all the time, we would be seeing constant reappraisals and continuous learning! What was it about this question that shifted his perspective? If we look back prior to the interview we can see two factors that contributed to this reappraisal:*

1. *Paul was in a 'learning frame of mind'. He was experiencing high degrees of 'discomfort' and unhappiness with his work and was putting a lot of energy into reflecting upon the causes of his unhappiness (sensemaking).*
2. *A number of events demonstrate the widely differing values between the organisation and himself:*

*"A number of inconsistencies have arisen in the work in the way in which different parts have been tackled. My partner/supervisor/lead author/SST expert prefers to gloss over these in the write-up.*

  - \* I'm uncomfortable living with such inconsistencies and would prefer a more solid position if the matter was brought up by the customer*
  - \* I'm uncomfortable working with people who seem to be happy with such inconsistencies*
  - \* being an 'expert' in a relatively new discipline doesn't imply any ability to be technically accurate, merely the ability to portray oneself as an expert. (June diary)*
3. *There were a number of events leading up to the interview that boosted his confidence and provided support for the evolving mental model:*

*"A real Eureka moment. Finally understand every step of a complex set of mathematical/statistical manipulations which deals with the uncertainty inherent when reading reactor temperatures and which has been puzzling me for 12 months. **I bask in a warm glow of satisfaction.** Even during the evening away from work the thought flashes through my mind. Of course the challenge now is to write it up so that everyone can understand it...whilst its still fresh in my mind....but other priorities loom*

*\*persistence and patience pays..eventually” (June diary)*

*The moment when he changes his mental model comes only 8 days after this significant event which in a sense tells Paul that he does have strengths, he is competent and leaves him on an emotional high. Whilst the cognitive component of this event (I am competent) directly contributes to the new mental model the emotional effects also play a role. Could this emotional high leave him more flexible in his sensemaking, more open to ideas from his subconscious and more creative in his responses?*

*All the other events (and his construal of them) also play a role. There is a clear pattern building up here. The new values and behaviours expected of him are becoming more explicit and increasingly affecting his work. He is experiencing growing discomfort with these expectations and he realises that it is highly unlikely that anything will change for the better.*

*It's as if all the components of the new jigsaw are in place, floating around in his mind and he has just got to find the picture, the model that organises all the pieces and makes sense of them all. This is what the question does for him. He realises that the reason he feels uncomfortable is not because he doesn't measure up to the organisation but the organisation doesn't measure up to him!*

\* \* \*

### **Excerpt from Carys Sale's Learning Biography**

Carys' problem presents itself in the form of sexual harassment from her boss. Slowly she becomes more and more stressed and she begins to develop a new construct:

*“Feel like I'm getting to know people well and enjoy it but very worried @ manager. Being taken along on jobs but not sure it's for the right reason”  
(July)*

*Her goals are now being undermined and the confidence that she had built up over the year is now seeping away. At this point the stress increases:*

#### *Prague trip*

*2:00 am knock on hotel room door after coping with clients and pub crawl through Prague. Very angry when phone call from manager followed. Stayed calm, explained it was totally inappropriate and would discuss next day. Work/seminar went well but now learning to deal w slimy customers. Being female is a burden here - or is it being an ignorant male. Very stressed - feel like running away. (September)*



*Manager claims to have left wife for me - crashed rental car 10 mins later. Very shocked. Withdrawing very much but now what? (September)*

*The emotions are now intense. She is now in survival mode: she feels like running away; she is withdrawing; she doesn't know what to do - all signs of stress. The stress increases during October and then she decides that she has to speak to someone else about the situation:*

*“Realised how serious situation was and prepared to speak to director about it. Felt quite sick and scared initially - even worried he might drive away and leave me in strange hotel he was so upset. Director was understanding - stressed I wanted to carry on with work but couldn't go on as it was - being dumped on etc. “I left my wife for you”. Felt great relief after explaining to director - then took about 10 days off!” (October)*

*At this point then, the stress reached such levels that Carys was forced to act. The dissonance around her competence has retreated into the background as all her energies are focused upon dealing with the current emotional crisis. After the action is taken she feels “great relief” - the emotional tension is released and Carys can take a holiday.*

*It is now, once the emotions have subsided that Carys can reflect upon the learning from the event:*

*“Have learned to sort out my emotional responses from logical, rational outcomes I'd like to achieve. Also realised that I must separate work “persona” from personal - protect myself really, not be so open here that some others can abuse this. Have also discovered who “good people” are from those I can't trust/rely on. Learning to be more “professional”. See what happens.” (October)*

*There are four distinct learning points here: distinguishing between emotional and logical responses; managing work persona; who can be trusted; being more professional. So the experience has generated some important learning for Carys - some new schemas have been generated around managing the work persona. All these schemas can be summarised under the heading - protect yourself.*

\* \* \*

Here we see examples of people searching for answers to their questions. Paul's question seems to be around ‘why am I so unhappy and demotivated at work?’ And he finds the answer in two ideas: ‘it's the organisation's fault – they have never

developed, inspired or led me’ and ‘I am competent when I am doing something I like and value’.

Carys’ question is around ‘can I make it in a private organisation – am I good enough?’ This is highly relevant for her self esteem. When her boss’ behaviour towards her becomes a problem she begins to reconstrue his past compliments as simply means to ‘woo’ her, rather than compliments about her ability. She deals with the problem and then develops a new schema around ‘protecting herself’, separating private from public personas (being more ‘professional’) and being less trusting (the existence of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ people).

At this point we can also see that whilst we are looking at learning in a ‘staged’ way, implying there is an ordered step-by-step sequence, this is not the case. Once in a sensemaking ‘frame of mind’ the questions, the emotions, the dissatisfaction, the questioning, the experimenting etc all tend to blend into each other causing a sort of chaotic learning state, which is driven by certain needs – i.e. to eradicate dissonance, anxiety and confusion, to make sense in a way that seems ‘plausible’ and which seems to work (goal achievement), to enhance self esteem and to protect one’s values. Having generated a new schema then, the next stage is to test it out. Sometimes this takes the form of testing two schemas to see which one seems to have the most ‘plausibility’. The notable aspect of this phase is that the two schemas are often battling to see which one holds the best predictive abilities. Sometimes one schema will be preferred over the other and often this is the old schema, which implies less need to change. The new schema, as Paul Richards has already pointed out, implies major psychological readjustment, hence there is often a dynamic of being highly attentive to cues that support the preferred schema and somewhat tentative regarding cues that support the less preferred schema.

\* \* \*

## **7.3 The drive to achieve generates changes in schemas**

### ***7.3.i Visionary Learning***

So far the learning we have explored has been somewhat negative and painful for the individuals concerned. The next type of learning is more positive. This is where in the context of visionary learning.

Only one of our diarists exhibits visionary learning completely and that is Jim Eddy. However, Mat Steele and Kay Mendes do exhibit signs of it as well.

It starts with a vision. The following is an excerpt from Jim Eddy's learning biography that shows the inception of the vision and the impact of it on Jim's learning.

#### **Excerpt from Jim Eddy's Learning Biography**

*At the beginning of the year, Jim's main focus is his desire to consolidate the values in the business and to develop people, particularly his immediate direct reports. There is no reference to the implementation the Business Excellence Model or BEM. The BEM is not referred to until May. After that point it is referred to on many occasions in all but two of the remaining months. It is clear then that it becomes the main goal and focus of attention:*

*we must make progress with BEM. (May)*

*This is definitely the way forward (May)*

*So what is it that makes Jim first attach such importance to the BEM? It is interesting that the other General Manager in the study also had access to the same model but did not give any attention or energy to it whatsoever. It is not inevitable that a senior manager would simply look at a business model like this and take it on board with such energy and commitment. So why does it appeal to Jim? There are probably a number of reasons:*

1. *Jim sees immediately that it is going to enable him to achieve some very important goals.*
2. *It embodies Jim's values, providing a framework for the systematic implementation of them in all parts of the business. Hence Jim believes in it passionately. It will put his depot "on the map" and, concomitantly, will put Jim on the map too.*
3. *It mirrors what his client, Tesco, are doing internally – this enables him to develop a rapport with the very client who is responsible for awarding the new contract.*
4. *It appeals to Jim's personality. He is a perfectionist and strives to do the best job he possibly can:*

*"I think as an individual, I'm a bit of a perfectionist.... And I just knew that however good I felt I might be, that I could actually do things better and things sort of crop up don't they? ... I'm almost, I had inherent issues around continuous improvement I think, I just like to be good." (i/v 2)*

*He is also intellectually curious and given a model that promises a basis for improvement he will grapple with it and enjoy the challenge to his own thinking:*

*"And I mean we've had some trigger points with that question, I mean the issues around the business excellence model clarified my thinking, no question about that, stuff around Balanced Scorecard, which came before that, just makes you think about things and what's important and having thought about what's important, you then think about how you can achieve what's important and that changes your mind to how you want to do things, what's important to you." (i/v 2)*

*Jim also enjoys the intellectual challenge, the learning and the excitement of change. He is always looking for something to move him forward:*

*"I think that's something in me about my optimism, my own way of looking at things as an opportunity, not seeing it as, well I suppose I saw it as a challenge, but not seeing it as a problem challenge, but seeing it as an opportunity challenge, because I tend to do that with most things...I'm a bit of a born optimist in many ways and I always look for something that's going to move me forward, or whatever I'm doing forward, so it wasn't a case of looking at the Business Excellence model and saying, oh my god, I don't understand that, it was a case of, I think I understand how this might work and that means I need to understand processes particularly, and as I say I don't*

*know what the driver for that is, except that I know that, for as long as I can remember, I've always approached things in that way.” (i/v 2)*

*So, having come across the model, unlike his counterpart in SS, Johns sees the potential it has for both achieving and enhancing his goals and values, relating to it also because it is presented in a format that appeals to his intellect, his curiosity and his logical style. There is a congruence here that enables an alignment to take place between Jim's personal values, goals, style, vision and strategy.*

*Having taken on board the BEM, Jim learns a lot through it. This is not simply a new schema he has taken on, it changes his existing schemas around structure, management roles and functions and how to understand his business as a whole (i.e. looking at the business in terms of processes as opposed to functions):*

*“The more I become involved with this idea/vehicle the more I realize that we have not yet understood all the potential for change that this model will deliver ....I'm still contemplating what applying this model may do to roles and responsibilities, it really is making me re-think all I thought I knew about structures etc” (June)*

*“The other major learning for me was that the team and I had not understood processes and that we would need to revisit our Process Workshop and therefore I will need to re-think my views on structure, it will still change but not in the ways I envisaged” (July)*

*It is as if, having committed himself to learning from the model and accepting the challenge it offers him, Jim is ready to open up his construing and happy to change his existing schemas in line with the new model. This is particularly the case as it supports Jim's existing value set – this does not undergo change!*

*\* \* \**

As a result of taking on board the vision Jim experiences a number of changes in his constructs:

- ◆ of his bosses and senior people in the organisation
- ◆ of his role and his future in the organisation

- ◆ of the structure, systems and processes of the organisation

This, together with the new constructs around the BEM, change management and his role as a ‘disciple’, his new behaviours (leading change upwards as opposed to receiving it, rather resignedly from his bosses) and his new emotional orientation towards his bosses, himself, his role, his career – create a completely different mind set than the one at the beginning of the year. This visionary learning is based upon a mind set that is willing to be flexible and open in its construal because that is what it takes in order to achieve the vision.

\* \* \*

Visionary learning seems to take place when there is alignment between the vision and one’s values, skills, goals and personal style. It appears to generate an energy:

“Strange as it may seem my energy levels seem particularly high and despite the efforts of my elders and betters I feel very optimistic about Strood and the progress we can make” (Jim Eddy, May)

and an enthusiastic optimism that overcomes fear, doubt and setbacks:

“Still very optimistic and so on, amazed some days about the amount of learning that’s going on. The only fly in the ointment is I’m not convinced about the capabilities of my board and their true ownership of BEM” (Jim Eddy, June)

One of the problems with visionary learning is maintaining the optimism and finding an environment that sustains it. Kay for example is able to counter setbacks for the sake of her vision at first, but the constant disconfirmations of her vision, her inability (both systemic and skills based) to influence the situation lead her to switch from visionary learning to that involving disconfirmation.

The energy behind visionary learning then, seems to stem from an alignment between goals/vision, personal values, high self esteem and emotional optimism. This is almost the opposite of disconfirmatory learning where one’s goals, values, self esteem and emotional well-being are all under threat.

### **7.3.ii The Drive to Achieve – Adaptive Learning ( Achieving a Performance Goal)**

Adaptive learning is seen most clearly in the learning biographies of Sandy Simmonds, John Gray, Tim Howes and Dan Smith. All of these diarists are newly promoted and have had their tasks radically changed in a way that raises questions concerning their competence – will they succeed? But perhaps the clearest example of schema change within adaptive learning comes from John Gray. The following is an excerpt from his learning biography:

#### **Excerpt from John Gray's Learning Biography**

*John refers to this (sales) course as a major life changing event for him:*

*“the thing that’s changed my attitudes most is probably the course run by Momentum, which is this thing about cause effect implications and there is no right or wrong and only implications...and all of that is about saying if you don’t understand and appreciate the other person’s point of view you will never be able to successfully negotiate with them” (i/v 2)*

*“(the course) I found probably more influential than many other things during the year.” (i/v 2)*

*The course seems to have influenced John in a number of ways:*

- *it has helped him to change his schema of a ‘sales person’. The changed schema is much more in line with John’s personal style and values and therefore enables him to see himself more as a sales person.*
- *it has given him a set of skills that he uses in his everyday work*
- *it has given him a ‘philosophy’, again which is very much in line with his own personal style and values.*

*We have seen that before the course, John had a schema of a sales person that he did not relate to. This came from attendance on another sales course that presented a very different approach from the negotiation skills course:*

*“I had only ever been on one other sales course before and its very much about how to sell shirts to people or whatever and how to do the hard sell... the double glazing sales approach” (i/v 2)*

*This course however, promoted a different approach:*

*“Putting yourself about and talking to people...listening to their issues and if there’s something that matches fine, if there isn’t, well it’s a few hours wasted or whatever it is, well it’s not wasted but you know what I mean” (i/v 2)*

*From the 360 feedback, one of John’s strengths was listening and here we have a sales approach where one of the central skills is listening. It is no wonder then that John claims that “it happens to fit my style as well” (i/v 2). So the course promotes a philosophy (the most important principle being ‘understanding how other people see the issue’), changes John’s schema of a ‘sales person’ and promotes a set of skills (asking questions and listening) that is very much in line with John’s approach already. What the course enables John to do is to ‘rationalise’ his natural style and develop his skills via “a set of tools to support that approach”. Maybe the reason this course had such an impact on John was that it reinforced existing values and beliefs, providing a justification for what John was naturally inclined to do. He had an existing schema of a sales person but he was not happy with it:*

*“and there was something inside me that knew that wasn’t right, for consulting or for myself, it just wouldn’t work,” (i/v 2)*

*Whereas this course “clarified an awful lot...and made so much sense”. What the course seems to have done is supported and made conscious John’s tacit knowledge - that his approach was right and the ‘double glazing approach’ was not. The course supported John’s own style and clarified some dissonance around his discomfort with his ‘sales’ schema. As a result John was much more receptive to taking on board the skills and concepts.*

*\* \* \**

So we can see from this excerpt that when an opportunity to change a schema presents itself in such a way as to reinforce existing values, skills and style then it is more readily adopted. In addition, John was in a state of dissonance when he attended the course – he had a negative schema around sales person yet one of his main roles as a board director was to sell. Hence the course was able to resolve this dissonance in a way that helped him achieve his performance goals.



Having experienced this change in schema the change continues as John starts to put it into practice. The schema therefore changes incrementally through experience and practice.

We can see here that the nature of the change that takes place via adaptive learning is relatively small and highly focused on ‘what do I need to do in order to succeed?’ with the energy focused more on the behavioural change rather than deep analysis of the issue. This works well when the issue is clearly identified and relatively straightforward and also when the focus on action meets the needs of the situation. It works less well when the situation is highly complex and more analysis is needed in order to ensure that the right questions are being raised and that attention is focused on the right areas. This becomes an issue for many diarists who learn via adaptive learning.

Sandy, for example, fails to analyse the real causes for the low morale in the organisation. Her diaries focus on cutting costs, winning business and looking good in her presentations. Despite occasional acknowledgement that she needs to look at staff morale issues, she never sits down to analyse the problem. She has a tendency to approach individual staff members in order to make them feel better but does not understand the systemic issues underlying the problem. She lacks paradigms around culture and psychology and is left at the end of the year not knowing what she could have done differently to improve morale.

We shall explore adaptive learning in greater detail when we look at behaviour change. For now, we can see that adaptive learning is the least likely to lead to profound changes in schema. It will tend to generate change that supports existing goals, values and personal style and it will generate incremental change based upon the experience of pursuing personal goals.

## **7.4 Changes in Emotional Orientation – How Guilt and Empathy Change Schemas**

Changes in emotional orientation can lead directly to changes in constructs or schemas. Of course we have seen that the initial stages of learning involve a change in emotional state, whether that be dissonance and anxiety in the case of disconfirmatory learning or excitement in the case of visionary learning. Whether the emotion or the changed construct (conscious or unconscious) comes first is probably something that we'll never know and in any case cannot be answered here.

Sometimes however, the process of changing an emotional orientation leads very specifically and directly to a change in schema. The following examples show how this occurs.

### ***Bill Fineman and Jim Barnes – Guilt, Anxiety and Empathy***

The following is an excerpt from Bill's learning biography. Bill was on the leadership team that implemented Jim's changes around the BEM. He was a close friend and supporter of Jim and hence was included in the change process very early on. He led the change and was in fact a beneficiary of the change.

After the changes had been implemented, Bill suffered feelings of guilt which he then went on to explore. This exploration caused him to recognise that he had been manipulative and dishonest (change in self schema) and helped him to change (refine) his change schema.

### **Excerpt from Bill Fineman's Learning Biography**

*“but I just think they felt they were manipulated. When people feel that way then they feel that their opinions, their values are worth nothing and then they get down, and they get depressed and they get you know, low self worth comes upon them and I suppose in a way some of the stuff for me was about guilt thinking, hang on, we should have done this differently and how can I set about trying to put some of it right.” (i/v 2)*

*“I felt responsible in a way I guess” (i/v 2)*

*So here we see the first signs of guilt spurring Bill to start thinking about his colleagues and how they are being affected. It is this guilt that makes him feel that he wants to support them. Part of this guilt stems from the fact that he is undermining his own values (involvement in particular) but at this stage he is not aware of it - he talks about this later.*

*However, there is also genuine empathy operating here. Bill describes the feelings of low self worth as someone who feels them himself and knows their impact (see section 3). His concern for his colleagues and desire to support them is genuine.*

*“I spent a lot of my time talking to people, talking to managers, spending time, hopefully trying to support them, probably did more in the last year of supporting managers individually, probably, yes certainly than the previous year. I’m sure that was about having the knowledge and the understanding I suppose, some of it was about recognising that there was some really good people of who were in danger of falling apart I think, and I wanted to try and do something about that personally, just because I felt responsible in a way” (i/v 2)*

*“We had a lot of stuff going on as you know, with the change and restructuring that was causing mayhem as well in people’s minds, future turmoil for people and I guess I was just trying to soften that a bit” (i/v 2)*

*“a lot of it’s about, I know these people and I’ve known them a long time. You see some people really struggling with stuff and you think, you shouldn’t have to struggle with that really and that’s not because of their inability to understand it was about the pressures that they’d been put under... (we) and I suppose if I’m really honest I felt that, we argued that people were involved in the change process, but the reality is, as we all know, wasn’t that. The decisions were made at a reasonably senior level and we just had to try and make people feel that they’d been consulted with.” (i/v 2)*

*One source of empathy for Bill is that he knows the people suffering under the change. It is much easier for him to empathise with their suffering because he knows, likes and feels sorry for these people who are, in effect, his friends. Another source of guilt for Bill was that he didn’t feel that he had acted in accordance with his values (integrity). He felt he had manipulated them. This causes him significant dissonance and is something he grapples with more than a year after these events - when is an action ‘manipulative’ and when is it ‘good management practice’; when do you ‘involve’ people and when do you not; when is openness and consultation simply not ‘good management practice’? How can it be good management not to act in*

*accordance with your values? These are the questions that are prompted by Bill's first experience of managing complex change.*

\* \* \*

In Jim Barnes' case a melee of emotions prompts some highly transformational sensemaking. Jim has been in a high profile project failure which has caused him a lot of emotional turmoil. He has not analysed this turmoil however, simply focusing on how awful he feels and what he can do to get rid of the feelings:

“(My boss) and I have been told not to do any more work until W and G have been to see R - probably at the end of the month. I have very mixed feelings on this. In a sense I'm glad that I don't have to work on it, but not being able to produce a satisfactory result for a customer is not good. Also this will no doubt cost SS and I'm not sure how that will reflect on (my boss) and myself. At the moment, SS management do not seem to be attaching any blame to us, which is good. In other organisations the view may not be as charitable.”  
(March)

So we have a sense of relief, guilt and anxiety. However, at this stage Jim believes that nothing he could have done would have made a difference to the outcome – in other words he does not want to analyse the problems. Later he describes this process:

“I think there is a tendency with projects to, if things start to go wrong, to sort of, it's almost burying your head in the sand, there is a tendency to try to beaver away and think well if I just do some extra hours on this, we'll turn it round and we'll get it right, and I think that's wrong because one of the lessons from this is that once you start to overspend on a project, you never ever recover it. You might think you've got other tasks where you can recover the overspend on an early task, but it just doesn't work like that” (i/v 2)

It was the persistence of his guilt, anxiety and other negative emotions however that force Jim to go into sensemaking mode to decide what it was that he could have done differently. This leads him to make a presentation to his peers on the causes of project failure:

“I wanted to do it because I thought if I did that I would finally purge it from my system you know, and get rid of it, and **so I did feel happier afterwards**, I felt as though, right that's it, that's the end of it and we've done our best out

of it, not only in terms of closing it out properly but also in letting people know what sort of problems we encountered, and what signs there are to look out to so they can try to avoid them in the future.” (i/v 2 - my emphasis).

In Jim’s case the initial change in emotional orientation causes him to refuse to go into sensemaking mode:

“I must not let myself be swayed by this reasoning. I am in danger of burying my head in the sand and beavering away like I did before” (i/v 2)

This is a classic case of where retrospective sensemaking in the form of self justification does not lead to transformational learning. It is the persistence of the negative emotions together with the effects of time (a lessening of the intensity and immediacy of the emotions) that leads to the final transformatory sensemaking.

\* \* \*

Both cases show how the build up of guilt and empathy can force people into sensemaking mode which triggers profound changes in both schemas and behaviour.

## **7.5 Changes in Behaviour generate changes in schemas**

We have touched a little on how going through a learning process that is disconfirmatory, problem centred (both involving dissonance from a failure to meet goals and needs), driven by performance goals and/or visionary can lead to changes in behaviour.

However, changes in behaviour can also lead to changes in schema. Jim Eddy for example suddenly changes his behaviour when he offers to make a presentation to the Board regarding an important client. The fact that this is accepted contributes to a change in his schema regarding ‘how to lead change’.

We have also seen how adaptive learning generates incremental changes in behaviour that in turn lead to changes in schema. When something ‘works’ after a change in behaviour then the schema is adapted to take this into account. Charles King is an example of this. Charles is someone who enjoys security and is not ambitious in his

career. He enjoys the status quo and is not given to change. However, having been offended by his company's behaviour, he suddenly proactively starts to network and gets himself a job within a few weeks. Charles learned a lot from this incident:

*“that just proves to me that its not what you know, its who you know, and its also getting off your backside and actually doing something about it. I think a lot of the time people don't realise that they do actually hold a lot of cards that you can play, that will push things your way and its happened, nerve's not quite to the right word but its actually having the ability - learn, I suppose its trying in on, but that's happened a few times, obviously we're getting the job as well, actually forcing things my way. Even simple things like ringing Barclaycard or something, who charge interest and saying - No I don't think this is fair, I've only defaulted on one day, the payment was late because so and so, and they are like - fine we agree, we'll give you the money back, but not everyone will do that. It's having the, just realising that in that situation you are the customer and they do want your custom and that they will bend over backwards a lot of times to keep you. You can influence things, there's lots of times that I think I could perhaps of influenced things but didn't.”*

\* \* \*

We shall see later that prior changes in behaviour are more common and frequent with regards to adaptive learning than the other types of learning. In the case of disconfirmatory, problem centred and visionary learning, behaviour change is more often the end result of the learning and is itself triggered by schema change. However we also find that once an individual moves from information processing into 'sensemaking' the learning process takes off with changes in schema leading to changes in behaviour which in turn lead to further changes in schema.

## **7.6 Summary - How do we change our schemas when going through change?**

We have seen in this chapter that learning most often emerges when people are attempting to pursue their goals and meet their needs in the external environment. The question that drives learning is 'what works?' or alternatively, 'why is this not working any more?'. This reflects Weick's question:

“is it still possible to take things for granted? And if the answer is no, if it has become impossible to continue with automatic information processing, then the question becomes, “why is this so?” And, “what next?” (1995:14)

Learning begins when we can no longer take the external environment for granted. If we do not seem able to meet our needs and achieve our goals then we have to engage in developing a better (i.e. more predictive and efficacious) schema of the environment, and more importantly, our place within it. This is important. For if we have to adapt our schema of the environment then we automatically have to adapt our schema of how we fit into that environment and how we act within it in order to achieve our goals and meet our needs. This means that any change in the schema of the environment in which we are pursuing our goals and needs, will automatically have implications for our self concept, self esteem and our choice of how we behave in the world. It is perhaps for this reason that people resist changing their schemas of their goal-relevant environment – it involves too much personal transition, emotional discomfort and overall uncertainty. For as we have seen, once the learning begins it tends to generate further learning and no-one is ever quite sure where they will end up. This is perhaps reflected in the fighting imagery that we sometimes encounter in people’s learning diaries. People talk about battles and struggling, guerrilla warfare, and revolution.

This is the cost of change – the emotional exhaustion and undermining of self-esteem that inhibits the ability to act. This is particularly the case if the change is forced upon you as is the case in dissonant learning. In this case we see the following dynamics taking place:

- ◆ Sudden irrefutable disconfirmation is rare but can occur when a cue massively disconfirms a schema that one is using to achieve an important goal or meet important needs, thereby jeopardising something of value to the learner. The situation has to be one in which it is difficult, if not impossible, to continue using the old schema – i.e. it has been discredited with those whose co-operation is needed in order to continue using it. This is likely to involve a sudden, radical and unwelcome re-organisation in self concept and hence, for the individual concerned, a ‘crisis’ mentality.

- ◆ Gradual disconfirmation is more common in situations of change. An individual can block out threatening cues by making sense of them in confirmatory ways but it becomes more and more difficult to do this. Gradually, the individual concerned will find that their existing schemas no longer provide plausibility or predictive power. As this occurs changes will take place in emotional orientation (frustration, depression, confusion etc.). The more intrusive the negative emotional state becomes the more likely the person will be to engage in transformational sensemaking. Once engaged in transformational sensemaking the individual will be highly receptive to schemas and constructs that seem to provide greater plausibility and predictive power whilst at the same time supporting self esteem. However, often the individual will have experienced significant undermining of self esteem over the period in question. This often generates two competing schema – one which may be more supportive of self esteem than the other.

But dissonant learning is only one type of learning – albeit a very common one for people forced to adapt to change. There is a more positive catalyst for changes in schemas. This is when an individual adopts a vision or performance goal that involves him or her operating in new environments with new goals and needs. People also change their schemas when experiencing visionary and adaptive learning:

- ◆ Not simply concerned with personal performance or happiness, but genuinely desirous of introducing change in his or her world, this learning is more widely focused than dissonant or adaptive learning. The visionary learner is highly receptive to any new or changed schemas or constructs that would seem to support the achievement of the vision.
- ◆ Adaptive learning based upon the drive to achieve a performance goal is less likely to generate massive change in constructs or schemas. The types of change associated with this type of learning is incremental, as a schema is developed through the process of experience and behavioural experiments. Again, the learner will be receptive to change that appears to support the achievement of the performance goal but will tend to focus learning only on



those areas important for the achievement of personal success. They will tend to be more conservative in terms of the change they expose themselves to – preferring to expend energy on practising and adapting behaviour to see what works rather than analysing and testing their understanding of the situation.

In all cases of learning, once the learning process has begun, there is a sense of an energy being unleashed with all sorts of potential for change occurring. At this point, changes in schemas and constructs can be triggered by changes in emotional orientation, in behaviour and by the introduction of new schemas and constructs. Again, this is a very different experience if you are driving the learning, committed to it and incentivised by the possibility of a valued reward. This feels exciting. However, if you do not feel in control of the learning, if it is forced upon you, if it threatens your goals, needs and values, this feels frightening.

Finally, as a result of transformational sensemaking learners may develop competing or untested schema. They will tend to spend some time testing different schema to see which has the best predictive power and plausibility. In the case of visionary learning however, the learner may be prepared to take higher risks and implement new/changed schemas before they have been fully tested. It may be many years before learners finally gain the courage to act on their changed schema.

## **Chapter 8      How People Change Their Emotional Orientation – Detailed Application of the Model - II**

### ***8.1 Introduction***

We have already seen how certain needs drive our learning, specifically the needs for:

Self esteem

Goal achievement

Support of our values (both motivational and idealistic)

Emotional well-being (meeting specific psychological needs e.g. security)

The argument we shall see presented in this chapter is that anything that seems to support these needs will generate in us a positive emotional orientation; anything that appears to threaten these needs will generate in us a negative emotional orientation.

The only mediating force is the sensemaking process. Hence different people might construe the same cue, (e.g. the cancellation of a training course by your manager) as either a deliberate intention to frustrate your goals or an inadvertent mistake. The way in which one construes the cue (in this case, the manager's behaviour) will affect the emotional orientation towards it. At the same time however, whilst we might consciously 'decide' to construe a cue in a positive way, tacitly we may be developing a quite different construal and emotional orientation. Whilst this research does not look at tacit learning we will mention it briefly at the end of this section.

However we end up construing a cue, there is a strong tendency to 'learn' a positive orientation towards those cues that support our goals, self esteem, values and emotional well-being. The only exception to this are the interesting emotions of guilt and empathy. This is when we become less concerned about ourselves and our own interests and more concerned about others' needs. This is also rare!

Appendix 3 shows how people changed their emotional orientations towards cues as a direct result of how they affected the four drivers of learning. Where relevant they also highlight the importance of the emotions of 'guilt' and 'empathy'. A more

detailed account of the processes involved can be found in the relevant learning biographies. We can see here how major shifts in emotional orientation seem to take place if our self esteem, values, emotional well-being and goals are significantly reinforced or threatened. We tend to ‘stamp’ those stimuli that generate pleasure with a warm ‘emotional orientation’ and stamp those stimuli that generate pain with a negative ‘emotional orientation’. Sally Peters regards management as ‘bad’, ‘weak’, ‘unsure’, ‘uncharismatic’, ‘soulless’ in part because they negate her values and her being:

“so the whole thing is just not managed, you’re just actually a number, this group’s going this, that group’s doing that, no communication with it, no consultation, and nobody actually asks you know, “what do think to it?”” (i/v 1)

“this place totally erodes your confidence, your self esteem your confidence. You get type set in that God you’re only capable of doing because they’ve just taken an easy option for getting work in from the nuclear industry and you get type cast and erodes your self esteem and your self confidence and it’s only by fighting out and away from that you revert to what you are to your true capabilities are.” (i/v 2)

Whereas Jim Barnes becomes more positive in his emotional orientation towards management because they supported his self esteem and his job security at a time when they were under threat:

“So, it made me realise that perhaps I’d undervalued managers in the past, perhaps hadn’t had very much contact with the senior managers like that, as regards to projects, so it made me realise that they, it’s not in their interests I suppose to apportion blame to people” (i/v 2)

“I think the main thing is I learnt, I will definitely bear in mind in future the role that managers here play, and I will certainly, if ever I detect signs of things going wrong, in terms of projects, I will certainly ask their advice and go to them probably much more quickly than I would have done otherwise, if I hadn’t had that experience.” (i/v 2)

There are exceptions to the simple pain/pleasure rule however. Guilt and empathy are two emotions that seem able to generate major shifts in emotional orientation. Both of them relate not so much to ourselves and whether we receive affirmation but to our sense of obligation, duty and commitment to others. For some people guilt is an

important source of learning, stemming from a need to be consistent in word and deed<sup>13</sup>:

“but I just think they felt they were manipulated. When people feel that way then they feel that their opinions, their values are worth nothing and then they get down, and they get depressed and they get you know, low self worth comes upon then and I suppose in a way some of the stuff for me was about guilt thinking, hang on, we should have done this differently and how can I set about trying to put some of it right.” (Bill Fineman, i/v 2)

Empathy seems to result from the experience of the need to ‘give’ to others what we ‘want’ from others (understanding, respect, validation, love, understanding). It results from a sense of mutuality and community; a sense that we should act unto others as we would have them act unto us. Again, it is a complex and not a necessarily pleasant experience. It often stirs up sensations of guilt – that we did not take into account the experiences, thoughts, desires, needs of others. It complicates our lives, forcing compromise and negotiation where it would be easier simply to pursue our own needs.

Both guilt and empathy however, are very powerful means of changing our emotional orientations in ways that are not selfish – i.e. they force us to account to and for others. Hence they can be unpleasant but may often generate a greater emotional maturity and willingness to understand and listen to other people. This in turn generates greater complexity in our understanding and schemas of the world, enhancing our ability to act effectively in the future. This of course all depends upon how they are handled and the source of the feelings (i.e. guilt may be the result of *inappropriate* childhood acculturation processes).

In this chapter we will explore some of these dynamics in greater depth. We will look at different instances of changing emotional orientation:

1. Changes in emotional orientation demonstrating the processes of affirmation and disconfirmation of our basic needs.
2. Changes in emotional orientation as the result of guilt and empathy.

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<sup>13</sup> See Rokeach, 1973

## **8.2 Changes in emotional orientation resulting from the affirmation and disconfirmation of basic needs**

We have seen above a brief overview of the changes experienced by the diarists in their emotional orientation to people, events and things and some of the dynamics underlying those changes. However we need to explore this in greater detail. We will do this by looking at one learning biography where we see most of these dynamics taking place – Alex Gray. Alex changes her emotional orientation towards herself (self esteem), towards the organisation and towards her role and the learning biography charts the shifts in detail over the period of a year.

### **Excerpt from Alex Gray's Learning Biography**

*At the beginning of the year Alex is enthusiastic about her organisation, it's future and her role within it. Ultimately she would like to develop her career in OD consultancy and sees the changes that the company will have to go through as providing her with helpful experience for her next move. When she talks about the organisation and her experience so far she is enthusiastic:*

*"I would like to move on, probably outside SS and move into a consultancy role. I haven't quite decided what yet, but certainly I'm very interested in personal development so, Myers Briggs type stuff, but also I'm quite interested in organisational development and change management, and I know that those three are completely huge disciplines each, so I'm not quite sure exactly where I want to go yet, so I think moving out of SS. But I have to say, I've been able to gain lots of experience in this current job in order to do that, so that's been really good" (i/v 1)*

*This enthusiasm derives from the clear recognition that the organisation will be able to help her achieve her career goals. But whilst she feels that the organisation will help her achieve her goals, working in the organisation can be quite challenging for her self esteem. This seems to depend quite heavily upon her views of how she is valued by her colleagues. We get an insight into this through her diaries:*

*"Decided I'd been letting "things" get in my way. Decided to be assertive and it made a big difference. Got a lot done. Why don't I do it more – I have this deep down feeling that people don't value what I do and therefore I feel as if I am imposing on them." (April)*

*Alex seems to rely on external validation in the workplace for her self esteem; there seems to be an assumption of 'if other people value me then I'm OK' and 'if they do not value me then I'm not OK'. And people will only value her if she performs well. This might be one reason why the bulk of Alex's attention is spent analysing how she performs and how she is perceived.*

*At this point we can see how important it is for Alex to receive affirmation of her self esteem from her peers. There are in fact two sets of peers – her potential customers (whose meetings she can facilitate for example) and her professional colleagues, who she often sees as a potential source of competition and/or threat. Her potential customers we shall refer to as 'client peers' whilst her professional equals we shall refer to as 'professional colleagues'. Both client peers and colleagues that affirm Alex receive positive emotional orientations and those that undermine her receive a negative emotional orientation. We see this quite clearly in her diaries:*

*She travels up to give advice to the MD and her team on her presentation roadshow. Alex will be mixing with people who are senior, potentially very important customers. The risks of failure or rejection are quite high:*

*"Made a special journey to R for this 400 mile round trip for 1 ½ hours because I felt it was really important. (Note: annoyed that S (KB note: S is a professional colleague/competitor) just strolled in and joined it when I'd had to work so very hard to be asked in. Shouldn't annoy me but he seems to be having everything laid before him whereas it's taken me 5 years (+) to get this far!!). Hard to get a word in edgeways but managed – stuck with being assertive – made a few good points – one of which was powerful enough to have turned the whole thing around ....(a client peer) said later he thought I would just shut up because everyone was talking and was impressed I held my ground. Was it worth it? Yes – my contribution will ultimately have altered a bit of the culture in an albeit indirect and intangible way." (April)*

*We get a sense here of the complexity of Alex's internal dynamics. All the time she is striving for the good opinion of her client peers – which in fact she gets. However, we notice that she feels very negative towards a professional colleague who has similar competencies to her own and who seems more accepted than she does (S, who is a graduate working with Alex's team). **This sense of threat affects her emotional orientation towards them.***

*Another low point comes in April with a visit by a colleague who acts in a similar capacity to Alex (PN). Alex acts in a way that is similar to how she reacted to 'S' above, though more extreme. She feels extremely threatened by this peer and the emotion curve dips to 1....*

*This is a pattern that we see again in September when she comes across another professional colleague (LH) in the organisation:*

*"I tried to step outside myself during it and it didn't work. I tried to force myself to keep calm – didn't work. Outwardly I will have seemed negative (although I tried to stop myself doing that too) – inwardly I was incredibly angry – got back to my office...and called LH, SS for everything in very choice language. I felt SS were ignoring all the skills I'd gained and my research and he was being so much more proactive than me and would do much better and that was actually my own fault for not being assertive.*

*However my real concern was: how could I hope to go out and be a consultant if I couldn't handle something like this???" (September)*

*Her colleagues seem to present to Alex the profoundest threat; she compares herself to them and always finds herself wanting in some respect; she feels that they are more competent than her; she feels they are valued by the organisation and she is not; she berates herself for not being like them and also for over-reacting and ultimately she feels that they 'prove' to her that she will never be able to achieve her goals – they are valued more highly than her and therefore she is simply not competent. We see her validating her fears based on no external evidence, simply how she feels. As soon as her fears are aroused she believes they are true – simply because she feels them!*

*However she also gets some positive affirmation from her client peers. She travels on a long journey with someone she feels does not value her:*

*"I was really surprised – he even praised me (in an indirect way). My opinion of him quite changed" (May)*

*Again it is noticeable how her attention is focused on the praise she construes, actively searching out answers to her question – 'do my peers value me'; 'am I competent?'. **Her emotional orientation towards the colleague changes on***

receiving the affirmation of her self and goals. On another occasion, conducting research for her MSc she reflects:

*“Reflected later that I’d learnt a lot from watching K operate with her research and rang her and thanked her. Felt very much the expert here – is that what its like to do consultancy? I really enjoyed it.”*

*Those people who help her and boost her self esteem, provoke positive emotional orientations and even more interestingly, a colleague who was not previously liked praises Alex and her emotional orientation towards him changes immediately.*

*So far then we have a picture of Alex who looks to her client peers for some sort of validation. It is from this validation that she derives her self esteem; when it is forthcoming she has more energy and is able to sustain difficult (for her) behaviours such as assertiveness. This then leads into a virtuous spiral whereby her assertiveness then leads to further positive feedback. However, when she fails to get validation (even in the form of her own self assessment) she is liable to fall into a vicious spiral of low self worth, doubt, hesitancy and lack of effectiveness. We have seen how lack of respect by her peers (as she sees it) has implications for everything that is important for Alex – her goals, self esteem and self concept. This extreme reliance on one source of information is dangerous particularly at a time when many of her peers are going through difficult periods themselves.*

*At this point another potential source for her unhappiness is introduced by her coach. He offers a different way of making sense – a more complex way of interpreting what is happening to her. Maybe it is not her fault that her peers do not value her; maybe it is a reflection of the culture and the values that permeate that culture:*

*“Very lethargic and feeling very low value today – seems to be cyclic (not menstrual). Keep your eye on it. I use a “give in” mechanism when this happens. F suggested I (again) look outside me to what might be causing it. Asked me to think about the fact that however much better the opportunities in this job are (compared with previous jobs) that SS has NOT CHANGED (enough). **Are the things that get me down really to do with my inability or really to do with the constraints, restrains, culture etc that SS still is?** I’m still not convinced anywhere else is any better but I should find out somehow!!” (April – my emphasis)*



*At this point then we see the development of two competing schemas explaining why Alex is not valued:*

*- my peers do not value me because I am not competent*

*- my peers do not value me because their values (and those of the organisation) differ from mine.*

*Slowly over time she builds an alternative self schema to the one she has built in the past. She takes on board her coach's comment and starts to believe that many of the responses and reactions she experiences derive from the culture of the organisation. At the same time she builds a more positive self esteem but much of this is built up outside of SS. It only takes one incident to shatter this delicate confidence and bring to the surface the old schema (I am not valued therefore I am not valuable). We shall quote this long passage in full:*

*"Came back from H with a number of great opportunities (in line with my learning goals/changing career etc). Was hacked off (in the background) because of cost cutting exercise took away my mobile phone (not so much that but I didn't have any warning of this) and asked R (her boss) to help make some space to grasp the opportunities and he basically couldn't see that was stressed, needed help to get over some blockages and told me to go away and get on with it all. I became extremely hacked off, stressed and went into "poor little me" mode Give him his due he did come back and say he'd been thinking how to make space for me but couldn't think of any way when I told him how he could help still felt pretty bad. Cause?? stress? don't know I am worried about research and still seem to have my whole life governed by SS but is that too much stress? previous failure when I tried the solution he proposed? this is a bit loaded being stuff outside my control that requires a shift in culture PMT? possibly a touch mobile phone/SS doesn't value me at all does it? yes a touch of this too coming back with opportunities important to me and seeing them potentially lost again? yes probably this too and finally yesterday found out SS were paying for PN to do a train the trainer Ashley Bookman course and this was lingering too. SO ALL IN ALL I SUPPOSE IT WASN'T SURPRISING but afterwards I felt I had been petulant" (June – my comments in italics)*

*We see in this passage how Alex changes her emotional orientation towards her boss (whom she likes), her organisation and ultimately herself in line with how she construes her goals and self esteem are affected.*

	<i>Signal</i>	<i>How Interpreted</i>	<i>Change in Emotional Orientation</i>	<i>Relevant for</i>
<i>Boss</i>	<i>did not help re opportunity</i>	<i>not interested? doesn't care?</i>	<i>more negative towards boss and organisation</i>	<i>goals self esteem</i>
<i>Organisation</i>	<i>took away mobile phone</i>	<i>they do not value me</i>	<i>more negative towards organisation</i>	<i>self esteem</i>
<i>Organisation</i>	<i>paying for professional colleague to attend course</i>	<i>they value him more than me</i>	<i>more negative towards organisation</i>	<i>self esteem goals</i>

*Overall she construes this incident as supporting the 'they do not value me because I am not competent' schema and as a result her self esteem suffers a significant setback.*

***Alex is highly sensitive therefore to any information or experience that serves to reinforce or disprove either of these schemas. However, she seems to be particularly vulnerable to any information that supports the second schema.***

*By the end of the year, Alex feels that the competence schema has been supported (I am not valued because of the culture of this organisation) but at the same time, emotionally all the setbacks she has experienced (as in the example above) have taken their toll. She has fought back and consciously interpreted her situation in a way that maintains her self esteem. There have been many signals that enable her to interpret the situation as due to the negative culture and values (skilled people leaving, a merger with another 'traditional' organisation, many cues based around cost-cutting, lack of communication and management priorities)...*

*However, she has been emotionally drained by all of the 'attacks' on her self esteem.*

*"it just comes back to this feeling I've tried to give you of SS knocking me down because I think...there's a different Alex out there somewhere" (i/v 2)*

*"I'm very much closer to, if you like, having the confidence to move on, though that's – it was very different from being an SS employee – whatever I do next, that's on the one hand, that's the positive side. In the negative sense I think I've just been worn down and become – where all my creativity and (Myers Briggs) 'N' has gone out of me at work." (i/v 2 – my comments in brackets)*

*So Alex allowed herself to be influenced by the positive times and examples of when she could do things to conclude 'I am competent'. At the same time however, she feels 'worn down'. She gets similar feedback from the second 360:*

***“Respondent 1***

*I have only got to really know Alex in the last year and this will have coloured my judgement. Alex's energies are not directed within the company any more and I think that this is the result of a clear decision that she has made. Her commitment, drive, creativity and enthusiasm are all focussed on a wider vision. This has impacted on her achievements at work. My feeling is that she isn't as visible as she was not as task oriented. However, I think that she is happy with the way her work is changing and she is gaining in confidence.*

***Respondent 2***

*Circumstances have conspired to make Alex less enthusiastic than she used to be.*

***Respondent 3***

*Alex has been less motivated by her work over the past year. Her interactions with her colleagues remain good on a personal level, but she is slightly less tolerant at a working level. I know she feels less valued by SS and that the added value she can bring to the workplace is being ignored. Consequently her morale is low and she is less prepared to adopt innovative approaches when faced by problems.”*

*So this feeling of low energy, low creativity and low morale has been spotted by Alex's colleagues and is a marked change over the year.*

\* \* \* \* \*

Alex' biography demonstrates the close inter-dependency of sensemaking and emotion both being driven by the over-riding need for goal accomplishment and self-esteem. The following presents a simplification and clarification of these processes:

Goal:	To move career into OD in order to achieve self fulfilment in line with my values (emotional well-being).
Strategy:	To develop competence through experience of managing culture change at SS
Anxiety:	Am I competent enough to achieve my goal?
Experience:	Unable to pursue strategy due to 'obstacles'
Sensemaking:	The generation of two schemas to account for experience:

- ◆ I am unable to achieve my goals due to my own incompetence (schema informed by anxiety)
- ◆ I am unable to achieve my goals due to unsupportive culture within SS (schema formed ‘rationally’ with help of coach).

Subsequent

reactions to cues:      How does this cue fit into either one of the above schemas?  
    Which schema is being reinforced here?

We can see here how:

- i.      Alex’ anxiety around her own competence has formed a negative self schema to account for her experience of not being able to achieve her goals (emotion influences sensemaking)
- ii.     her coach helped her to form a more ‘rational’, self-affirming schema through the process of joint sensemaking.
- iii.    The existence of these two schema influenced how Alex interpreted subsequent cues. Cues were filtered through these schema in order to aid interpretation and guide subsequent emotional responses. Sensemaking therefore affected emotion.
- iv.     Despite concluding in favour of the self affirming schema, the emotional ‘wear and tear’ of experiencing constant onslaughts on her self esteem had generated deep exhaustion. Hence although she believes herself competent, she feels lacking in energy, creativity, optimism and enthusiasm. Her self esteem may be higher but her emotional well-being is considerably lower.
- v.      Her emotional orientation towards cues is affected by how they support her self esteem, goals, values and/or emotional well-being. On the one hand we saw how a simple piece of praise can change Alex’ emotional orientation towards someone. However, many of the cues are filtered through her schemas first. This helps Alex to assess the emotional significance of a cue e.g. the organisation withdrawing her mobile phone is guided through her ‘the organisation does not value me’ schema and leads to a more negative emotional orientation towards both the organisation and herself.

Alex' biography is an example of how our emotional orientation towards cues is affected by how those cues are construed as supporting our goals, needs, values and emotional well-being. It shows the symbiosis of emotion and sensemaking and how both are driven by the need to achieve goals and self esteem. Other good examples of this are Will Payne, Paul Richards and to a lesser extent Dan Smith.

Sally Peters also provides an example of how emotional orientations develop when our *values* are disconfirmed – something not so apparent with Alex. She also provides a good example of how emotional orientation can change subtly and without conscious processing. The following is an excerpt from Sally's learning biography:

**“Karen:** *So, do you sometimes take these triggers and sit down and really think about what the implications of these – of what should I do, or do you just let it rest.*

**Sally:** *No, I don't even know I consciously register them at the time, it's just that at some other point in the reckoning that it suddenly comes to your mind but it's registered with you. I think as a here and now thing nothing happens, you take it on board but don't do a lot about it at the time I think it's lots of things that slowly add up.” (i/v 2)*

**“Karen:** *And what do you think sort of triggered the not going back to normal or not necessarily triggered because, again, we decided it wasn't triggered as such but what led to?*

**Sally:** *I think actually it's recognition for a lot of it you've actually got to register it all and you have these sudden moments don't you where something suddenly hits you and it goes 'dong' straight into place”.*

*“everything you do affects one way or another, you get the job right it affects you, if your boss is shitty it affects you, so it all affects you emotions one way or another. I can't sort of say that there's – affects me more emotionally because everything does positively and negatively don't they, well that's the way I see it so I can't see that it actually makes that much difference.” (i/v 2)*

*So events come and go, they affect you emotionally either positively or negatively but Sally does not necessarily sit down and work out the meaning at the time. The events are stored and meaning is constructed but not necessarily consciously. Constructs are formed subconsciously (such as 'management is poor') and then events serve to reinforce or disconfirm the constructs.*

Rob Tyler also describes how he realised quite suddenly how he had picked up an emotional orientation towards a colleague quite unconsciously:

*In April Rob states in his diary:*

*“Reflected on how my behaviour towards R (supportive, understanding) is different to my behaviour to ST. Both are product champions - but I’m fairly negative with ST. Because I think him lazy?”*

*This simple insight has a profound effect on Rob. As he begins to reflect about ST, probably for the first time he begins to see that he has somehow picked up an unwarranted prejudice about him:*

*“It was and it happened very early on so it was good for me. **And that changed me completely**, strange, really strange, because I don’t know where I picked up this issue (his prejudice) with ST, obviously by something I picked up from other people because I don’t interact with him. I was on a training course with him and ...I quite liked Steve and yet we came to the same business years later, and I had this bias and I couldn’t tell you where I got it, I mean I obviously picked it up from other people and things weren’t going well with the interaction with Steve, and it exactly matched the bias and it just, it was just reinforced” (RT, i/v 2)*

*Through the interaction with ST Rob realised that he had picked up an unfounded prejudice that was exposed as such when he started empathising with him. He was shocked that he had this prejudice and it formed an important insight into his own learning processes.*

Although we can see that people do pick up emotional orientations towards people and other cues quite unconsciously, we do not have means of tracking this in the diaries. What I wish to do here however is to acknowledge the counterpoint to my emphasis on conscious sensemaking. According to Sally, emotional orientations develop with the accumulation of split second reactions to events that by-pass conscious processing (classic stimulus response conditioning!). The implication is that sub-conscious processing does take place – the event has to be stored in memory somewhere. However, it is only in retrospect, or in a sudden flash of insight, that the meaning of certain events emerges or a tacit construct is made conscious.

So we can see then that it is not simply the existence of affirmatory or disconfirmatory events that affects our emotional orientation, it is also how we construe those events. Our construal will depend a lot upon how we have developed existing patterns of construal (around attribution style for example) and upon existing schemas and emotional orientations. Hence if we have a negative self schema this will affect how we construe ongoing events. Anxieties may create and feed particular constructs so emotions also affect sensemaking. Emotions affect what we attend to, the ‘plausibility’ of certain schema, how we process events and what we ‘avoid’ facing (see below and previous section).

Our sensemaking may also be tacit. In this case, there is probably a more direct link between pain/pleasure and emotional orientation.

Much seems to depend upon how we process cues. We may process them unconsciously, as Rob did when he developed a prejudice about someone without being aware of it. We may process them quickly and without much thought, as Sally describes. We experience a fleeting emotion – a high or a low – and then do not think much more about it. In the case of Alex, for example, we see highly complex, conscious sensemaking activity, aided by a coach. These different processing styles seem to mediate how we eventually develop emotional orientations towards cues. In summary, then, there appears to be three different ways of processing the ‘cue’.

- i. Tacit
- ii. Simple
- iii. Complex

***i. Tacit Reinforcement or Disconfirmation***

Tacit reinforcement or disconfirmation occurs when events are registered as being relevant for key schema (around self esteem, goals, emotional well-being and values) and affect those schema without there being any conscious processing. This dynamic may involve the unconscious processing of a key event or it may involve the unconscious processing of the non-appearance of an expected or desired event (e.g. ‘lack of praise’, ‘lack of support’). The confirmation or disconfirmation may build up

over time with the learner never becoming really aware of how his or her emotional orientation has changed. If they do become aware of it, they may never really know the underlying reasons for the change (c.f. Sally Peters and Rob Tyler above)

*ii. Simple Reinforcement or Disconfirmation*

Simple reinforcement takes place when an event or person supports your being, competence, goals or values. A person may change their emotional orientation towards a catalyst simply because it supports the learner in some way.

With simple reinforcement, emotional orientation will change according to how one's being, competence, goals and values are reinforced. There is a more direct link between the immediate emotional response to a cue and the resultant emotional orientation, with very little cognitive processing taking place in between.

*iii. Complex Reinforcement*

Kay feels that her new boss treats her badly but she does not immediately develop a negative judgement of him. She suspends judgement, partly because it would not be in her interest to develop a negative attitude towards her boss. We saw too how Alex develops a highly complex manner of interpreting cues. We have a choice in how we construe events in terms of their meaning. Our construal processes are therefore important 'intervening variables' between the catalyst and the resultant emotional orientation.

Complex processing seems to result in:

- ◆ a willingness to postpone the development of an emotional orientation
- ◆ a willingness to develop an emotional orientation that is more cogniscent of the complexity in the situation – i.e. not simply 'hating' someone because he insulted you. It shows a willingness to take other people's goals and needs into account before you develop the emotional orientation towards them.



### ***8.3 Changes in emotional orientation as the result of guilt and empathy***

Three diarists demonstrate very clearly how guilt and empathy lead to changes in emotional orientation: Kay Mendes, Bill Fineman and Jim Eddy. It is significant that all three are in positions of leading change as the actions that evoke the guilt come as a result of implementing their own change agenda. The experience of guilt and empathy stem from a sense of responsibility for the people they are leading and/or managing. In addition Sandy Simmonds demonstrates a nice case of learning via empathy without there being any guilt present.

The dynamics involved in each case are slightly different. Bill gives us the purest example of the operation of guilt stemming from an honest appraisal of his own actions set against his personal value set. Jim benefits from discussions with Bill and his guilt/empathy for others comes about as he ‘realises’ how they must have experienced the change.

Kay’s case is somewhat different. As she begins to lose hope of ever achieving her goals in the organisation her attention broadens – she is less focused on achieving her goals. She begins to devote her attention to three related schemas:

- ◆ her management style which was somewhat criticised via some 360 feedback and its impact on her team
- ◆ the management style and values of her seniors and the impact of their behaviour upon herself
- ◆ the impact of their behaviour on others in the organisation.

It is whilst she is making sense of these threads that she experiences high degrees of empathy for the people in her team, becomes less intolerant and also expresses some guilt over the way she handled a member of her team at the beginning of the year.

Sandy shows us how by empathising with people who have different perceptions to yourself, the process of empathy helps you to absorb their perspective of the situation.

Because Bill charts his learning in more detail we will use him as a focus for our exploration of guilt and empathy but whenever appropriate we will also refer to Sandy and Kay's experiences.

**Excerpt from Bill Fineman's Learning Biography**

*Bill is the HR manager at the depot and a member of the senior management team. He is a close confidant of the General Manager, sharing similar values and complementing his style. Bill had already stated his concern for people in his first interview. He believes in honesty, integrity and fairness regarding people:*

*“I've always been – always believed you should treat people fairly and that doesn't mean that they get away with murder, it doesn't mean that they haven't got a job to do, but in the context of what you are trying achieve, you should treat people as fairly as you can. It doesn't mean that it's always going to be fair does it? Just means you got to be as fair as you can, but you've still got a job to do so” (Bill Fineman, i/v 1)*

*He also believes in compassion and understanding:*

*“people management is about relationships and it's about feelings and it's about all those things, it isn't just about 'here's the rules, do it' so I'm very much about getting the job done as you know from the thing we did, I am tasked focus in that sense, so I'm not woolly, I know people might say I am, but I'm not necessarily woolly because I understand there's a job to do, I understand that the human resource if you like, is just another resource in that sense and there is a business to be run, however, it doesn't mean you can't do that with feelings and understandings and realising that people are coming from different angles” (Bill Fineman, i/v 1)*

*However, Bill is not always known for these qualities at the depot!...what we see in interview one is a picture of 3 facets of Bill's approach to people: firstly he is a champion for a more people-oriented culture (putting into place a number of initiatives that make a big impact in this area); secondly his personal style can be abrasive, intolerant and over-powering; thirdly, he is very good in a one-to-one situation where he listens well and earns people's trust.*

*This is not about hypocrisy. As we shall see, Bill questions his motives regularly and assesses his actions more thoroughly than many other diarists. In my view Bill's behaviour can be attributed to the types of schemas he employs in the three different scenarios. His people schemas at this stage seem to be mostly about systems and*

*processes. He is more concerned about the culture of the depot rather than thinking a lot about the people as individuals; he is concerned about having excellent health and safety, training and development and promotion systems which is partly about his own need for achievement (we shall see this later). At this early stage in his career (he was a truck driver only 4 years prior to this interview) Bill has learned a lot about systems but he has not yet developed a paradigm based on human psychology. However, when placed in a one-to-one situation, he will trigger the schema of the individual he has in front of him and respond appropriately to that individual. The story of Bill's learning over the year then, is the story of how he develops a psychological paradigm in order to assist in his management of change and his consequent relations with people... ..*

*...When we look at the diaries Bill mentions the change process (or the 'process management' concepts driving it) at least once a month (except August). At first Bill's concern is for his own understanding and confidence:*

***“Process mgt workshop***

*unfamiliar subject - nervous for first ten minutes - clear to most in the room. Relaxed after team became involved in programme. Outcome successful - at least they now know what I know (although this may not be entirely accurate!)” (Bill Fineman, March)*

***“TQMI process mgt workshop***

*Course similar to that conducted at (the depot). Confirmed that information passed was correct. Increased own confidence in subject material and under-pinned own knowledge level. Active involvement increased as confidence grew. Interesting to note that those attending both courses were much more involved and confident (e.g. I and D).” (Bill Fineman, April)*

*Bill, at this stage is concerned about his own performance - this is one of the main themes in the diaries (54 mentions, with the next subject gaining 27). However it does not take long before Bill picks up on some signals from the rest of the SMT:*

***Update meeting on progress toward BE self assessment***

*Concerned that some team members are not getting involved. Decide to speak to them separately. Learnt that the process is a bit stretching in terms of understanding the jargon and strategy (Bill Fineman, June)*

So Bill is picking up signals from the team at this point and approaching them one by one to discover the issues. **His attention has shifted from concern with his own understanding and performance (self esteem and goal needs) to concern for others in the team. This may be due to the fact that he is now more comfortable with his own performance and this leaves more 'space' for him to attend to other matters.** There is only one more entry regarding his own unsure feelings and there are many more when he appears comfortable and in control. This would seem to support this view.

So, at this stage, he has a bit more space to consider issues outside his own performance and, in addition, his feelings are drawing his attention to what is going on with his colleagues. Another entry in September shows this quite clearly:

**"SMT change programme meeting**  
difficult meeting with people protecting their own areas initially, but then working well to arrive at new organisational model. Concerned for some people who feel threatened by the change. feel need to support them." (Bill Fineman, September)

Bill is feeling concerned for his colleagues and, interestingly, feels the need to support them. A number of feelings could be operating here - empathy, concern for the change programme and guilt. We have some evidence to support the latter. An entry in May mentions a book that Bill is reading on change. He pays particular attention to the notion of 'survivor syndrome'. The people who 'lose out' in the change are the three colleagues in the top team; Bill, the General Manager and another colleague, rarely mentioned by Bill, are the 'survivors'. These are the people who are liable to suffer from 'survivor syndrome' and so one wonders whether Bill's concern is for himself and his own feelings of guilt. This is supported in the second interview when he states quite openly:

"I felt responsible in a way I guess" (Bill Fineman, i/v 2)

"I just think they felt they were manipulated. When people feel that way then they feel that their opinions, their values are worth nothing and then they get down, and they get depressed and they get you know, low self worth comes upon them and I suppose in a way some of the stuff for me was about guilt" (Bill Fineman, i/v 2).

*So here we see the first signs of guilt spurring Bill to start thinking about his colleagues and how they are being affected. It is this guilt that makes him feel that he wants to support them. Part of this guilt stems from the fact that he is undermining his own values (involvement in particular) but at this stage he is not aware of it - he talks about this later.*

*However, there is also genuine empathy operating here. Bill describes the feelings of low self worth as someone who feels them himself and knows their impact (see learning biography, section 3). His concern for his colleagues and desire to support them is genuine.*

*However, this assessment of his feelings comes later. In September he is just beginning to experience them. In the following entries Bill reverts back to the change process - meetings, presentations and processes and does not mention his colleagues again until November (his last entry):*

***“SMT meeting on HR issues***

*really good to meet as a team. Noticed that everyone is a little distant from each other since decision to reorganise. have learned that in these situations we must increase communication NOT back away from discussions. Openness is best policy.” (Bill Fineman, November)*

*At this point however, Bill’s colleagues are beginning to feel some of the intense negative feelings that will characterise the next 6 months:*

*“What seemed to happen was that (Bill the GM and their other colleague) were spending more and more time together discussing the way forward for the depot and individuals, and because of this, the rest of the team felt dejected and demotivated. These feelings led to those of mistrust and in some cases, anger” (An SMT colleague, diaries November to March)*

*Another writes about being rejected from the new leadership team:*

*“this felt really bad and myself along with the other out of favour managers formed our own clique to try and provide some support for each other. This soon became two management groups deflecting each other” (An SMT colleague, February)*

So Bill's diary entry is somewhat out of synch with the rest of the team. He claims it is "really good to meet as a team." He still has positive feelings about the team. He notices however, that "everyone is a little distant from each other since decision to reorganise". Again, this is an understatement! Moreover, typical of Bill's learning style, he notices this after the event - not having anticipated it all beforehand. Like his GM, he does not have a psychological paradigm that would have enabled him to anticipate all of these emotional reactions. Bill's conclusion at this stage is somewhat abstract: "have learned that in these situations we must increase communication NOT back away from discussions. Openness is best policy." Bill is not yet ready to take responsibility for some of the outcomes of the change policy that he has been instrumental in pushing. **However, he senses that much more needs to be said and understood. We know that Bill changes his behaviour and begins to talk to people much more on a one-to-one basis, coaching and counselling them when he can.** We do not know when this starts but Bill's general unease with his colleagues' reactions seems to act as a spur to him initiating conversations with people (see June entry above).

**What we are seeing here then, is the beginnings of Bill's shift of attention from himself, his goals and his performance to others, their reactions, their emotions. This shift has been facilitated partly by Bill's growing self confidence (leaving him 'space' to think about other issues) and partly by Bill's emotions (empathy and guilt). At this point however he is making sense of things in a somewhat distant manner - not taking and accepting responsibility for the outcomes himself. But he is beginning to change his behaviour by talking to people more, listening and being more supportive and less overbearing.** As his General Manager notes at the end of the year:

*"I think he's, I don't think he's realised that, but I think he's tempered his style with people, I think he could be in the past, very abrasive with people, and he's realised that that isn't quite the right way to get the best out of them, and I think that's changed."* (Jim Eddy, i/v 2)

In the second interview Bill looks back on the learning he experienced:

*“Bill So last year was a real learning thing for me in terms of thinking about other people, I probably learnt, spent more time thinking about how other people are feeling last year, than I ever did before.”*

*Karen: Right, so what brought that on then?*

*Bill: Some of it was discussions you and I were having in fairness...”*

*(Bill Fineman, i/v 2)*

*“I spent a lot of my time talking to people, talking to managers, spending time, hopefully trying to support them, probably did more in the last year of supporting managers individually, probably, yes certainly than the previous year. I’m sure that was about having the knowledge and the understanding I suppose, some of it was about recognising that there was some really good people of who were in danger of falling apart I think, and I wanted to try and do something about that personally, just because I felt responsible in a way I guess because, if you’re the person whose in many ways driven in this, then you’ve got to take responsibility for the outcomes. Some of the outcomes were that people were feeling very, very uncomfortable” (Bill Fineman, i/v 2)*

*These two passages indicate both what Bill has learned and how he has learned it. Firstly, Bill drove through the changes and experienced the outcomes. We have already seen what alerted him to the fact that people were finding it very difficult to cope with the changes (empathy and guilt). **This then spurred new behaviours - listening to and supporting people. As he did this, his empathy and understanding grew around how his colleagues were reacting to the changes and his responsibility in that. As his guilt grew, so his desire to help grew.** Bill himself describes how the guilt spurs his actions:*

*“Karen: So there was a bit of guilt involved as well?*

*Bill: There was a little bit of trying a pay back almost.” (Bill Fineman, i/v 2)*

*As he changes his behaviour so he begins to understand and empathise more with his colleagues and his schema around change begins to grow and develop. This was helped by the mentoring of two consultants Bill forged a relationship with; he also mentions some chats he and I had about the dynamics of change and how people are affected by it.*

*Bill describes how he begins to see the links between how the change is implemented and the psychological effects this was having on people:*

*“We had a lot of stuff going on as you know, with the change and restructuring that was causing mayhem as well in people’s minds, future turmoil for people and I guess I was just trying to soften that a bit” (i/v 2)*

*“a lot of it’s about, I know these people and I’ve known them a long time. You see some people really struggling with stuff and you think, you shouldn’t have to struggle with that really and that’s not because of their inability to understand it was about the pressures that they’d been put under... (we) disenfranchised people, put them under pressure, and I suppose if I’m really honest I felt that, we argued that people were involved in the change process, but the reality is, as we all know, wasn’t that. The decisions were made at a reasonably senior level and we just had to try and make people feel that they’d been consulted with.” (Bill Fineman, i/v 2)*

*One source of empathy for Bill is that he knows the people suffering under the change. It is much easier for him to empathise with their suffering because he knows, likes and feels sorry for these people who are, in effect, his friends. Another source of guilt for Bill was that he didn’t feel that he had acted in accordance with his values (integrity). He felt he had manipulated them. This causes him significant dissonance and is something he grapples with more than a year after these events:*

*“but then we decided to say, yes, we’ll consult. What a load of old tut, we didn’t do that at all, we led people by the nose to a conclusion that we’d already decided upon, is what we actually did” (Bill Fineman, i/v 2)*

*Bill is honest enough to recognise that he did not act in accordance with his values - in fact he did something he dislikes, he manipulated people. It is this dissonance, together with concern, empathy and a genuine desire to help that prompts some deep reflection and learning on his part. He helped to initiate change that led to deep unhappiness amongst people he liked and respected, moreover he did it in a way that Bill sees could be described as manipulative. It is this that provokes significant changes in Bill, starting with a greater empathy towards his colleagues and team mates:*

*“I think I’ve probably become more, I’m more patient now, more reflective now. I think I’m still, I think I can still have a bit of fun and a bit of a laugh but I think, I’m more aware of other people’s feelings” (Bill Fineman, i/v 2)*

*This is supported by Bill’s GM when he describes Bill as having “tempered his style with people”, from being “very abrasive with people...he’s realised that that isn’t quite the right way to get the best out of them”.*



*This is classic experiential learning - at it's best. Over time, as Bill begins to understand the implications of his actions he ruthlessly analyses his own behaviour and responsibility for the outcomes. Despite the pain and guilt, he is not defensive; he does not duck difficult and painful learning but confronts it head on. He also reflects on the theoretical and moral implications of his experience deducing new theories on how to manage change and how best to act in similar circumstances. As he understands and empathises more he changes how he feels about others and how he behaves towards them.*

\* \* \*

We can see here certain stages in Bill's journey

- ◆ his attention is freed up – Bill is satisfied about his own competence and no longer needs to worry about this
- ◆ his attention being freed up, he can now pay attention to other matters – his feelings of concern and anxiety about other members of the team capture his attention
- ◆ lacking an understanding of what they might be experiencing he does what he is good at – talks to people on a one-to-one basis. Bill is good in this type of scenario as his 'empathy' seems to come to the fore a lot more and his natural understanding of the person is engaged <sup>14</sup>
- ◆ through the process of listening to people he begins to understand how people are experiencing his changes
- ◆ his natural concern for people he knows and likes together with the recollection of his own childhood feelings of low self worth trigger both guilt and empathy<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> "But he is an excellent listener once you get him in a one to one situation and he's usually spot on with his advice. I've been to Bill loads of times just to talk things over when I've got problems and he's a very good listener." (colleague: i/v 1)

<sup>15</sup> "a lot of it's about, I know these people and I've known them a long time. You see some people really struggling with stuff" (Bill, i/v 2)

- ◆ interestingly the guilt triggers further sensemaking around what it was he actually did to cause the pain; this is where Bill brings his values in. Up to now the guilt has been based upon a sense that he caused others pain. At this point it changes to encompass the notion that he violated his own values
- ◆ this recognition then triggers changes in behaviour as Bill attempts to alleviate the pain and relieve his own guilt:

We can see from this journey how closely intertwined guilt and empathy are.

Clearly, guilt derives in part at least from empathy – recognition that one has been the cause of others’ pain. However it also derives from a sense that one has not acted in accordance with one’s stated values.

This pattern of freeing up of attention, focusing on others, exploring the problem, adjusting one’s schema in line with feelings of guilt and empathy and then acting in a way to alleviate the guilt is seen in the learning biographies of Kay Mendes, Jim Eddy and Rob Tyler.

\* \* \*

However, we shall see another pattern of learning via empathy in Sandy Simmond’s learning biography. Sandy dislikes being negative or critical of anyone but has joined a new part of SS, a recently acquired company which was grown by its owner-founder, a Canadian software specialist. The people in this new company are highly critical of the bureaucratic style and nature of the parent company and this criticism causes Sandy some tension. She wants to be accepted by the new people without having to criticise her colleagues in the parent company.

**Excerpt from Sandy Simmonds’ Learning Biography**

*Sandy values the people in the new company (particularly the leaders) extremely highly, in much the same vein as she does her leaders in SS Consulting (the parent company). The leader in ES (new company) is a “real entrepreneur-type, the visionary”, “a wonderful guy to work with, absolutely wonderful”, a “great visionary and entrepreneur” a “leader”. The people themselves:*

*“are really innovative and creative, you get all these really eh you know eh I’m trying to think of the correct word interesting people, they work odd hours and they work really hard, and they’re really fired up by what they’re doing in terms of technical innovation and they’re really fired up by beating their competitors and it’s fun, it’s really lively and they tend to be quite young and so on. And they mess around and there’s a lot of joking” (Sandy Simmonds, i/v 2)*

*So by admiring, liking and valuing the people Sandy absorbs their schemas even if this is difficult as it involves criticising her own company. This is an interesting example of how we can change our schemas almost by osmosis, by being in the company of people we like and admire we begin to think like them. We tend to open up our construal processes. And what Sandy seems to have done is to absorb their value set – ‘hire and fire’, ‘entrepreneurial’, ‘risk-taking’. It is when she views the world through these new values that she begins to change her constructs.*

*But in opening up her construal process like this Sandy experiences some tension. If she absorbs these new values she will have to be critical of her existing leaders in SS. As we have seen she dislikes being critical and negative. She also has a notion of the SS leaders as ‘inspirational’ and ‘charismatic’. She describes her Chief Executive as “a marvel to behold.... very, very able, inspirational type folk...just a brilliant leader....a lot of presence, a lot of natural presence, you know, and watching him in front of large groups and staff is very impressive”.*

*So whilst Sandy opens up her construal to empathise with the people there is a limit to what she allows herself to absorb. There is a tension in holding two parallel schemas (or values) and Sandy tries to harmonise them rather than coming down on one side or the other:*

*“so I guess yeah, it does make me look at SS, **not more negatively at all**, but just that we are a very special company because we have this interesting mix of technology, and our background but there are all these good things out there going on, and if you could take some of those and bring some of that in, that would be really good and blend and mix and so on.” (Sandy Simmonds, i/v 2)*

*Having said that, Sandy does re-consider the implications of her new schema of SS for her own working patterns and assumptions:*

*“So there’s a sort of historic legacy sort of feeling and it’s made me realise quite how much I’m used to working around the SS way of doing things, whereas actually them challenging me, means that afterwards I’ve sort of thought, well why don’t I challenge that?” (Sandy Simmonds, i/v 2)*

*“it’s made me think a bit more about and realise how much my working pattern’s, the way I work is so engrained into me, the system that I just work round it, or don’t, my thinking got constrained because I know that that’s not possible and whereas actually, chipping away at it” (Sandy Simmonds, i/v 2)*

*Whilst we do not have any evidence that this re-thinking has led her to adopt new or changed behaviours we can see that Sandy’s empathy has led her to re-construe her own approach by looking at her world through the lens of a new schema. What is interesting here is that the **new** schema seems to consist of a different set of values which then facilitates a **change** in how she construes the organisation and herself. So Sandy experiences a lot of change via the mechanism of empathy.*

What is perhaps interesting about Sandy’s experience is that it seems particularly suited to her personality style. Sandy prefers to be positive and up-beat, supportive and helpful and hates conflict of any kind. Hence she experiences dissonance – if she wants to be supportive and avoid conflict with her new people she will have to accept their perspective which in turn would lead her to be critical of her prior bosses, something that would cause her intense discomfort. But Sandy makes sense of the situation to meet all her needs - to be liked and to be supportive whilst not being disloyal to her old colleagues. Moreover the learning mechanism itself is supportive and people oriented – it comes through listening to others and trying to understand their perspective. Hence it is uniquely suited to Sandy’s own personal style and preferences.

In these cases we have seen how a significant change in emotional orientation comes about through the mechanisms of empathy and guilt. However the first step in this process is to capture the learner’s attention. This in itself is a considerable task as we have seen that empathy involves devoting energy to other people’s needs and concerns – whereas most of the time all of our energies are absorbed with meeting our own! In the cases of Bill, Jim and Rob it seems that ‘guilt’ might have played a role in capturing attention. Kay’s attention was caught in part by her desire to

improve her management capabilities. In Sandy's case her own needs to be accepted by her new colleagues helped her to empathise with their views. So even in the cases of empathy and guilt learners still see personal benefit in confronting potentially painful truths.

\* \* \* \* \*

People seem to engage in more complex processing of emotional cues under at least three separate circumstances:

1. The pre-existence of conflicting schemas that are being tested out in reality (i.e. the complexity pre-dates the appearance of the emotional cue)
2. The experience of conflict in one's goals, needs, values and desires
3. The experience of guilt and/or empathy

In all cases there is a large amount of dissonance experienced as we attempt to meet conflicting needs and goals and values. In order to eradicate the dissonance we need to process the cues more complexly – not simply jumping to conclusions that someone is not to be trusted because he did not help in promoting your goals. If this someone is your boss, then a simplistic processing of the cues in this way could itself inhibit your goals as it will impede your relationship with your boss. However, what may happen is that whilst you try consciously to make sense of events in a generous way, tacitly your negative emotions build up under the surface.

If all these emotions are handled effectively however, they can lead towards more complex thinking and action both in terms of understanding ourselves and in terms of understanding others. Having experienced intense levels of guilt and empathy, Bill and Kay went off to talk more to the people involved. As they did so their understanding of others and their own personal mistakes increased. They developed more complex, variegated schemas around how to achieve their goals whilst at the same time taking into account the needs of others.

If these emotions prove too overwhelming however, and the self esteem needs dominate the values needs, we get 'rationalisation' and a withdrawal from the full complexity 'available' in the situation.

## **8.4 Conclusions**

We have seen a number of different processes involved in changing emotional orientations. The most important dynamic that seems to be involved is the reinforcement or disconfirmation of an individual's self esteem, goals, emotional well-being and values. But much will depend upon how the cue is processed. We have seen three different means of processing the 'cue'.

- i. Tacit
- ii. Simple
- iii. Complex

Tacit reinforcement or disconfirmation occurs when 'needs-relevant' events occur, affecting the individual emotionally but without there being any conscious processing. If they do become aware of it, they may never really know the underlying reasons for the change (c.f. Sally Peters and Rob Tyler)

Simple reinforcement takes place when an event or person supports your being, competence, goals or values. A person may change their emotional orientation towards a catalyst simply because it supports the learner in some way: With simple reinforcement, emotional orientation will change according to how one's being, competence, goals and values are reinforced. There is a more direct link between the immediate emotional response to a cue and the resultant emotional orientation, with very little cognitive processing taking place in between.

Complex processing occurs in situations of conflict between competing needs, goals, values, schemas and emotions. It is not quite clear what schema should be used to process the cue – in other words, the learner is confused as to the meaning of the cue. This occurs for example, when there are conflicting schemas for interpreting events,

where goals and values conflict (or goals compete amongst each other) and where there are high levels of guilt or empathy.

Our construal processes are therefore important ‘intervening variables’ between the catalyst and the resultant emotional orientation. At the same time however, whilst we might consciously ‘decide’ to construe a cue in a positive way, tacitly we may be developing a quite different construal and emotional orientation. There is an emotional ‘wear and tear’ of experiencing constant onslaughts on self esteem that can generate deep exhaustion. Hence self esteem may be higher but emotional well-being is considerably lower.

Guilt and empathy appear to be powerful means of changing our emotional orientation and deserve separate consideration. Partly this is because they are not self-serving, and are one of the few examples of when we change our emotional orientation due to a concern not with our own needs but with the needs of others. Hence they can be unpleasant but may often generate a greater emotional maturity and willingness to understand and listen to other people. This in turn generates greater complexity in our understanding and schemas of the world, enhancing our ability to act effectively in the future.

Whilst guilt appears to require some degree of empathy, empathy need not stir guilt. Empathy can result in learning without the feeling of guilt. Sandy Simmonds, for example, absorbs the schemas of the people around her (even though this does involve a threat to her values) simply by admiring and respecting them.

However, guilt and empathy are often connected and often result from two sources:

- ◆ a sense of moral obligation – sensing the need to act unto others as we would have them act unto us.
- ◆ a sense of emotional connectedness – an ability to experience the emotions of others as they suffer pain

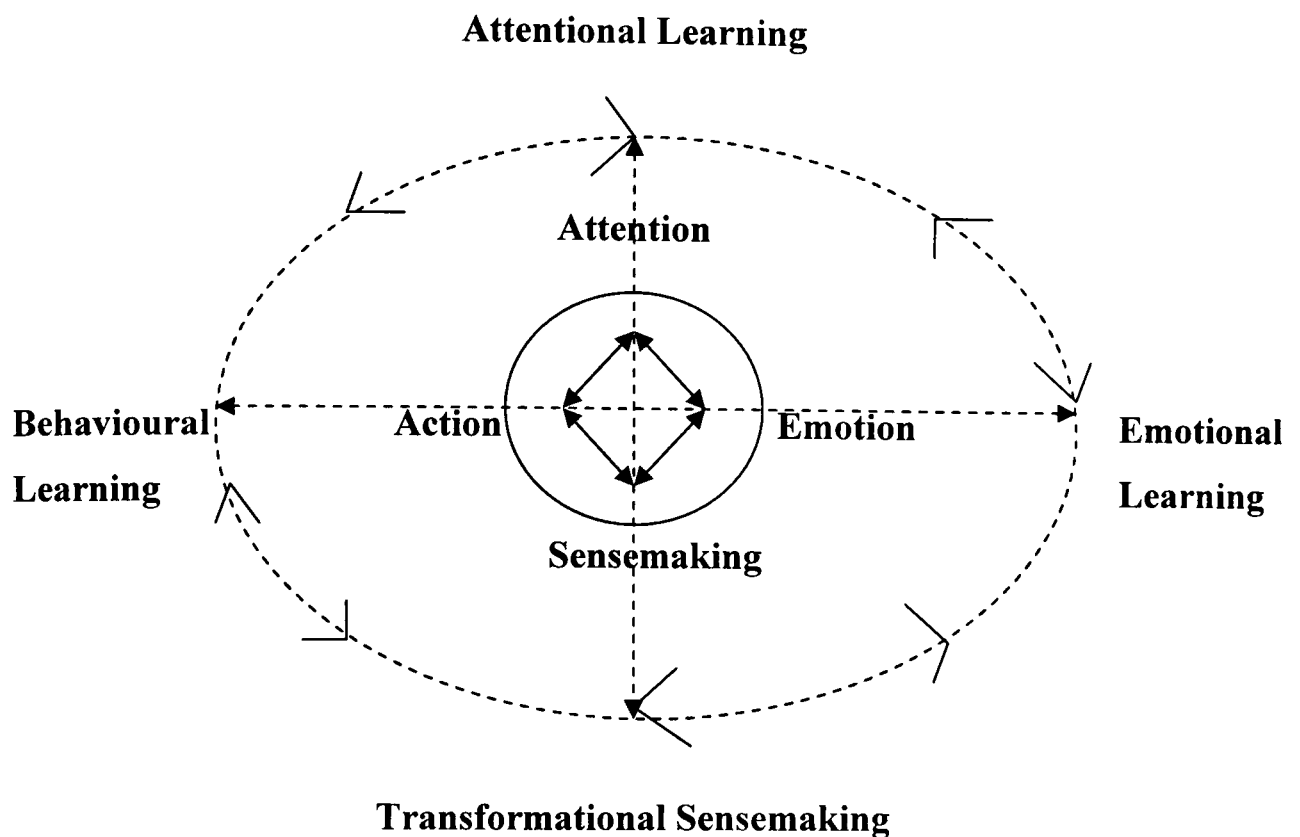
Again, it is a complex and not a necessarily pleasant experience. It often stirs up sensations of guilt – that we did not take into account the experiences, thoughts, desires, needs of others. It complicates our lives, forcing compromise and negotiation where it would be easier simply to pursue our own needs.

There appears to be a pattern that characterises the emergence of guilt and/or empathy. This involves

- ◆ the freeing of attention
- ◆ the focusing of attention onto other people's needs and concerns
- ◆ exploring the problem by talking to people and accessing their experiences
- ◆ experiencing feelings of empathy and guilt
- ◆ changing one's emotional orientation towards the people involved
- ◆ the development of new/changed schema to account for the situation
- ◆ changes in behaviour as the learner may often attempt to alleviate the pain and relieve his own guilt

In fact we can map this process onto the learning cycle we referred to in Chapter Six





The first stage in any change in emotional orientation begins when a cue gains the learner's attention. If the learner decides to focus his or her attention on the cue then attentional learning has taken place. This process became particularly clear when Bill, Kay, Jim and Rob, for example, paid attention to people they had previously ignored.

Having decided to pay attention to the cue, the cue is processed either automatically or complexly. If they are processed complexly the learner devotes cognitive and emotional energy to sensemaking (i.e. moves to the outer circle). At the same time emotions are immediately aroused and the learner begins to make sense of them. In the case of guilt, for example, the learning moves from intense emotional pain to trying to make sense of both the pain and the action that generated the guilt. At this stage new constructs can be generated and transformational sensemaking can take place.

Eventually the learner changes his behaviour towards the cue. In the case of guilt, the learner tries to make reparations. In the case of reduced self esteem that becomes intrusive, the learner may decide to exit from the source of the low self esteem (Sally Peters, Alex Gray, Steve Black).

We have looked at the importance of gaining people's *attention*, especially when there is dissonance and a conflict between goals and values. People are tempted not to take account of what they should do when it conflicts with what they want! All the emotional learning that took place started with a learner paying attention to a cue because it was relevant to their needs. More interesting perhaps is when people suddenly pay attention to a cue that does not meet their needs. Hence Kay attends to her people, Bill attends to his peers in the management team, Rob attends to a colleague whom he had previously dismissed. All of this was prompted by previously prominent goals fading into the background (either because they had been achieved or were never going to be achieved), the expansion of attention and the emergence of new cues – often driven by feelings of guilt or empathy.

This implies that people appear to attend to issues in a certain order. Bill wants to establish his competence with regards to the change process before he can devote attention to the needs of the other SMT members. Kay only devotes her attention to her management style once she realises she will not achieve her goals in the organisation. Unless and until people pay attention to certain areas (whether consciously or unconsciously) they will tend not to develop in those areas.

However, once they do pay attention they are subject to all sorts of *emotions and thoughts*. *They feel and think, think and feel*. They feel guilt and make sense of that guilt in a way that generates both new and change schemas and emotional orientations. They think about what their direct reports have experienced and feel empathy, concern and guilt. Thinking and feeling are closely intertwined. However, whether and how the 'feeling' will result in emotional learning (a change in emotional orientation) will depend upon how complexly the cue is 'processed'. The more thinking that is involved in processing the cue the less likely there is to be a simple connection between negative emotional responses to a cue and negative emotional orientations resulting.

Finally *action* is then generated. We have not fully explored behaviour change in this chapter which is the subject of the next chapter.

# **Chapter 9. How People Change Their Behaviour When Going Through Change – Detailed Application of the Model III**

## ***9.1 Preface***

When looking at developing new and changed behaviour patterns we need to make a few provisos to this chapter.

Firstly, as mentioned in the chapter on methodology, this study was not able to pick up finely grained information regarding changes in behaviour of the participants. We rely for evidence of changed or new behaviours on self-reports and in some though not all cases, 360 feedback (verbal and written). This of course has a number of disadvantages. People may perceive that they have changed their behaviour but others do not 'see' the change. We may develop a bias and 'fool ourselves' that we have changed our behaviour in order to maintain self-esteem but in actual fact no behaviour change takes place. Self reports of behaviour change are generally not considered very reliable. Having said this, the examples of behaviour change (and new behaviours) used in the analysis tend to be those where we have significant evidence, from the diaries over a period of time, from the second interviews and from 360 feedback. The new or changed behaviours consist of something obviously verifiable. In a number of cases people left their jobs after long periods of time with the same organisation. This was clear evidence of a change in behaviour (Paul Richards, Kay Mendes, Steve Black, Sally Peters, Ian Brown). In other cases, self reports of behaviour change were substantiated by accounts from bosses and direct reports (Will Payne, Alex Gray, Bill Fineman, Kay Mendes). For other people changed behaviour was clearly evident in the new roles that they undertook. For example both John Gray and Tim Howes had to adopt more selling behaviours for their new sales oriented roles. They describe quite clearly how they experiment with different behaviours, observing which work and which do not. In another case Jim Barnes does something he has never done before – give a presentation to his peers on what went wrong with his project and how to avoid the same mistakes.

So the main focus in this chapter is on new or changed behaviours that are clearly evident as opposed to fine grained. This leads to a bias in the study against unconscious behaviour change and we will examine this in the conclusions.

## ***9.2 Introduction and outline of chapter***

All learning contains risks – of failure, of mistakes, of embarrassment – but the risk only becomes ‘real’ once the learning is translated into new or changed behaviour. Behaviour change results from deciding to take the risk of testing our new schemas in the real world. When we adopt new and/or changed behaviours we invite feedback – did it work – and the risk might be that everything we think we have learned turns out not to be effective. As a result the type of learning state tends to have a great influence as to whether people see the rewards of learning as outweighing the risks – visionary learners being most ready to take on risk and dissonant learners the least.

In addition it became apparent that behavioural change appears to be characterised by a series of stages:

a transitional stage where clarity is sought as to what behavioural change is necessary, possible and desired. This leads to a behavioural ‘lag’ or delay before change is undertaken

an experimental stage where chosen new behaviours are tested out to see what works

an integration stage where behaviours perceived to have ‘worked’ for the learner are integrated into his or her behavioural repertoire.

This chapter will therefore aim to do two things:

1. explore the dynamics of behavioural change according to whether the learning is adaptive, visionary or dissonant
2. explore the dynamics of the behavioural lag and the subsequent experimental and integration stages. However, we will use adaptive and visionary learning to

explore the experimental and integration phases and we will use dissonant learning to explore the dynamics of the transitional phase. As will be seen, the experimental and integration phases are more apparent with adaptive and visionary learning whilst dissonant learning is the ideal situation in which to explore the dynamics of transition. Hence the chapter looks as follows:

### **9.3 *Behaviour Change In the Context of Adaptive Learning***

Experimentation

Integration

The 'Behavioural Lag'

### **9.4 *Behaviour Change In the Context of Visionary Learning***

Experimentation

Integration

The 'Behavioural Lag'

### **9.5 *Behaviour Change In the Context of Dissonant Learning***

Dissonant Learning and the Behavioural Lag

The Behavioural Lag and The Reality Phase: do I need to change?

The Behavioural Lag - From the Identity and Capability to the Action

Phase: Do I want to change? Can I change? Will I change?

### **9.6 *Conclusions***

## 9.3 *Behaviour Change in the Context of Adaptive Learning*

### 9.3.i *Experimentation*

In many ways adopting new and changed behaviours in order to pursue performance goals is perhaps the most familiar form of learning in organisations. If we look at the learning cycle, prior changes in emotional orientation and changes in schema often take place very quickly as the result of taking on a new performance goal. If someone is told that in order to further their career (assuming this is a valued goal) they have to sell more or be more assertive, they quickly re-orient themselves towards this new goal both emotionally and intellectually and want to start to experiment. The adaptive learner starts his or her learning journey with an acceptance that he or she will need to change in order to successfully meet the new goals.

We see this quite clearly with John Gray, Sandy Simmonds and Tim Howes:

#### **John Gray**

“I was offered a job on the board, so that was, and in a field totally outside of the market area that I had previously had experience of, so I was offered a promotion to a new site, demanding culture change, and to a new job which was completely outside my historical nuclear background, in non nuclear, and it was a promotion to a divisional board, so very different responsibilities”  
(John Gray, i/v 2)

As a result John knows that he has to change, so he sets some objectives for the year:

“they’re being comfortable in dealing with senior managers in other external businesses” (John Gray, i/v 1)

“to feel actually that I’m more able to develop strategy and strategic thinking rather than day to day thinking.” (John Gray, i/v 1)

“I do feel that one of the other things that I’ve had reflected back to me as a weakness is, in terms of being a director, I probably do have a tendency to be too nice to people. I’m not impatient enough, and firm and not brutal enough but basically impatient enough with people and on things it’s been suggested that I do end up just looking a bit more, not irritable, but I think impatient’s probably the word” (John Gray, i/v 1)

There is no question here that John is reluctant to change or that he does not recognise the need for change. He is straight into the experimental phase consciously and carefully changing his behaviour (being more assertive) and adopting new behaviours (selling) in order to see what works:

“Reflecting on the meetings, which went well anyway, helped identify how they could have been managed to be even better. This reflection was a direct result of the negotiation and influencing skills course.” (John Gray, July diary)

Another diary entry reveals how he reflects upon what he felt worked particularly well and what he might need to change next time:

“try to use examples of work carried out or that we could carry out which related directly to that person e.g. by asking them a question about their work environment first keeping explanations brief and then asking a question (otherwise never find out what is important to them) and following up” (John Gray, September diary)

There are many diary entries in this vein with John amending and changing his behaviour throughout the year in order to achieve his goal of performing effectively at Board level.

### **Sandy Simmonds**

We see a similar pattern with Sandy. She is given a promotion, a new role in a new company with different responsibilities. She is clear that her environment has changed and if she is going to be successful in it she has to change:

“I felt when I got the new job I thought this kind of control panel, and I just didn’t understand the instructions at all.” (Sandy Simmonds, i/v 2)

“So I really do feel that basically I didn’t know what I was doing technically.... so big technical fog, using a new set of instruments, so it really was, for the first few months, just wading through treacle” (Sandy Simmonds, i/v 2)

And throughout the diaries we see Sandy consciously trying to change her behaviour:

“Did not manage communication process – should have checked that individuals most affected had been briefed before meeting. Next time trust gut feeling – do not leave important things to chance” (Sandy Simmonds, March)

“Negotiation more difficult than should have been – need to get all facts before started. Positive outcome due to sensible relationship with other business” (Sandy Simmonds, April)

This represents the tenor of the diary entries throughout the year. Sandy reflects on each incident and identifies what she will do differently next time or what she did that helped it go well.

It is important to note that as people change their behaviour and reflect upon the consequences they are also building and developing their schema and emotional orientations at the same time. Hence this is not a one off learning cycle but a continuous spiral of cognitive, emotional and behavioural change.

### ***9.3.ii Integration Phase***

It is less easy to see the integration phase in behavioural change. This is because the acceptance and rejection of behaviours is less obviously referred to than the simple experimentation with them.

However, we do see in the diary entries a concern to repeat behaviours that work and to reject behaviours that do not:

“and you start working in that new style, **you feel comfortable with it**, and over the four months that’s where I was, and I just thought, there were tremendous possibilities.”(Will Payne, i/v 2)

#### ***Advised at annual review to give more upbeat/action and result orientated report at Board meeting***

Did this...and it worked well. Good learning point and (boss) fed back that she had noticed and that it had worked well. (John Gray, July)

#### ***Big meeting with head guy - challenging and tricky***

meeting with N - I overemphasized not digressing from task - planning etc. to point that he noticed and asked why - had to explain but got too close to saying it was due to him getting off track - too personal and not my responsibility etc. Got out of it but close and uncomfortable call. Have to learn to be more subtle and shut up! (Carys Sale, April diary)



### ***Application for working excess hours for me***

I advised my senior manager that this working was imminent before it started. In responding to my claim he said it was not large enough to pay. I did not protest but said the hours had already been booked on the jobs....Came back and said they would pay 60% of it. Lesson: do not argue strongly against this senior manager (softly softly catchy monkey). (Mat Steele, January diary)

We also see people repeating and copying behaviours and using them until they feel they have reached a required standard:

“So I think that the strategy was really sort of finding the key people who could give me the, in the case of the vision it’s just repeating it and repeating it...and again it’s really just working with the right people and sort of tagging on to their coat tails until you actually get up to speed.” (Sandy Simmonds, i/v 2)

Also we see people experimenting with behaviours that do not quite work for them. Ben, for example, was advised to be more assertive by his manager. As part of his adaptive learning he tries various new behaviours. The following is an extract from the learning biography:

### **Excerpt from Ben Baker’s Learning Biography**

*“Getting better at saying no! And improving delegation techniques” (Ben Baker, October)*

*“Ben I do say no a bit more to people.*

*Karen And since when have you been saying no more?*

*Ben Quite a long time now, looking back into last year and I think realising that you can’t do everything and some of the meetings, like the health and safety meetings you go to and someone will come up with a suggestion and you think about it, and before you’d say all right, I’ll take it away and have a look at it, but now it’s, you can’t do that, it’s ridiculous, and squash it there and then, rather than having something else on the list to look at because you end up having to much and you’d never achieve anything, so I’m getting better at saying no, and making quicker decisions, and whether it upsets people or not, because that’s probably one of the reasons why you don’t want to upset people. I think I upset Linda this week, because it was cold wasn’t it, she wanted the heating on, and I said No! And that was it.” (i/v 2)*

*But whilst Ben feels he has changed his behaviour towards others, this has not necessarily been noticed by those around him. This may be due, partly to the fact that the changes have thrown up even more conflict, and whilst Ben has been*

*changing he has not been able to change enough to keep up with the increased level of conflict management required. One of his seniors claims:*

*“a number of issues have been going on work wise with various people that had to be sorted out and Ben’s really, he’s ducked them” (i/v 2)*

*So what we can say at this point is that Ben’s emotional orientation towards other people has changed. This may have manifested itself in changed behaviour but, probably due to the increased levels of conflict management he has had to deal with, his bosses have not noticed, nor does it appear to have been enough.*

*It is clear that Ben is going against his preferences when confronting conflict and saying no. Hence this will always be a difficult area for him to address. We have also seen how this fear of conflict tends to show itself in a wariness towards others.*

\* \* \*

As he points out in his May diary:

“Environment project training day  
Good day. I met many new people from other businesses. But I must be more outgoing - do I want to be?” (Ben Baker, May)

Not all new or changed behaviours will be integrated as they will conflict against natural preferences and values:

“Decided I’d been letting “things” get in my way. Decided to be assertive and it made a big difference. Got a lot done. Why don’t I do it more – I have this deep down feeling that people don’t value what I do and therefore I feel as if I am imposing on them.” (Alex Gray, April)

“What I would do differently, and I would, what I did last time I think, was just said, we’ll try our best but probably fail. Whereas this time I would say that no, it is going to take longer and so we now need to decide whether we’re going to do it and have honest numbers, or make the decision that we’re better off deploying those people elsewhere, I’m sure I would now. But it’s quite difficult, for me, I found, coming into this if you like, as the junior member of the organisation, to try and challenge people who had an awful lot more experience than me, saying that this just doesn’t make sense. And yet that’s what I perhaps should have done.” (John Gray, i/v 2)

So in the integration phase we see people working out:

- what new or changed behaviours work
- what new or changed behaviours do not work
- what new or changed behaviours feel right and are in accordance with their personal style and values.

As they work out the answers to these questions so they refine and adapt their new schemas in order to reflect a process of integration – not only what works, but what works *for me*. Hence some of this will involve adjustments in self concept as well as schemas reflecting the external world.

### ***9.3.iii The Behavioural Lag***

However, not all adaptive learning runs so smoothly. John Gray, for example, has accepted his new Board level role but has hidden dissonance regarding ‘selling’. His current schema of selling implies a low level, manipulative approach which does not sit easily with his current client schemas nor his self concept or his values. Hence John is still in the early stages of the learning cycle – he has seen that the environment has changed; he knows that he has to change but he is not sure that he wants to nor does he feel able to make the change that he imagines (based on his schema of selling) that he needs to make. This is why the sales course makes such an impact on him and facilitates his behaviour change – it changes his schema of selling so that it is in line with his client schema, his self concept and his values. Specifically it changes his schema of what types of behaviours will be required of him. He no longer has to face adopting ‘alien’ behaviours that he does not value. Within this new schema, John can adopt behaviours that are much more in line with his values and skills. John now feels much more able to make the (less radical) behavioural changes required of him:

Karen Did that make you change your perception of yourself as a sales person?

John Yes, it did...because if you like, I knew I could sell because I had sold but I didn't think of myself as a sales person...before I would probably have said that I was worrying that I should be somebody I'm not, that I should be a foot in the door salesman, and really pushing and driving for those sales, whereas now I think, I don't even think that is a valid approach....whereas using this approach which now gives me a set of tools to support that approach is a much more effective way and it happens to fit my style as well”  
(John Gray, i/v2)

Of course this is not evidence that these skills were used in practice - this simply shows a new schema and a new emotional orientation around selling. However, we do have some evidence that John is putting these skills into practice:

“John and I used the Momentum Harvard Business School negotiation techniques” (John Gray, December)

So even with adaptive learning, where behaviour change is common, we do sometimes see dissonance in the early stages of the learning cycle that has to be resolved before behaviour change is fully committed to. This commitment seems to involve a number of stages whereby the individual moves from recognition of the need to change to a commitment of the ‘will’ – I will change.

In John Gray’s example we see a phased approach to behavioural change moving from the first stage of transition (recognition of the need to change); to the second stage, wanting to change; the third stage is feeling able to change and the fourth stage is making the commitment of the will – I will change:

1. Recognition of the need to change (‘I need to change’)
2. Wanting to change (‘I want to change’)
3. Feeling able to make the changes (‘I can change’)
4. Commitment (‘I will change’).

The individual moves from one stage to another as he or she increasingly resolves the dissonance. In John’s case this involved attending a sales course that reframed selling to fit in with his values and self concept. This helped him to establish that he wanted to change and that he could change.

This delay in changing behaviour despite the fact that one recognises the need for change I term the ‘behavioural lag’. It is a transitional phase between changing one’s schema of the environment and making the final behaviour change. In this transitional phase the learner has to resolve internal dissonance before the final commitment to behaviour change can take place.

## **9.4 Behaviour Change in the Context of Visionary Learning**

Visionary learning shares similar characteristics to adaptive learning in that the learner is ready and willing to experiment with behaviour change. However, the emotional climate of visionary learning is quite different. The visionary learner knows that he might not succeed but his own personal self esteem or competence is not his or her primary concern – the vision is more important than how one is seen by others. The visionary learner often sees his learning journey in terms of a fight or a battle where you are fighting ‘enemies’ for something you believe in, something bigger than yourself.

### **9.4.i Experimental Phase**

As a result of the different aims and emotional climate the range of behaviour change is broader with the visionary learner. With visionary learners they will simply do anything they need to do in a variety of learning domains – including influencing bosses, direct reports, clients and peers. The questions they need to address are bigger – how to change an organisation – and as a result they are more interested in behavioural strategies. These comprise sets of behaviours aimed at achieving a particular outcome, rather than one or two behaviours (eg. asking more questions). As a result their behaviour change is more spontaneous, less circumspect and planned:

#### ***Tesco/LL Meeting***

there is to be a meeting “at the highest levels” of our companies, there is major concern that our directors will not understand where Tesco are coming from or where we are in Tesco perceptions and where we are in terms of the site developments. I ended up tackling both L (his boss) and T on this issue and thankfully I’m going to be given a chance to present to the Board on these issues - did I say thankfully? (Jim Eddy, May)

This is something that Jim has not done before - taken ownership of an issue raised at Board level and proactively attempted to influence the outcome. In fact Jim surprises himself, doing things in pursuit of his vision that he never anticipated:

“My decision to put (the depot) on the map has worked. I’ve done more presentations to GMs and Directors in the last 3 months than we’ve done in

the last 3 years. Thank you (I think) for the chat we had around power, I'm now on 2 key groups although I'm not sure I consciously went looking for this but then you know my views on things that you wish for. It's been a real hard month in many ways but we are achieving our objectives even the ones I hadn't realised I'd set." (Jim Eddy, July)

Often the experimental phase for visionary learning is less conscious and controlled than for adaptive learning. It is more haphazard. With visionary learning there may be a number of experiments all taking place at the same time and the learner is looking to see which ones will take off and which ones will simply fail to flourish.

Again, we see learners continually adapting their schema and adjusting their emotional orientations in line with their behavioural experiments.

#### ***9.4.ii Integration Phase***

In the integration phase the visionary learner is interested in what strategies work and what do not. For Jim Eddy, it was quite clear that lobbying senior management was clearly the right way to go – and as a result he has a network, an alliance for change, a profile and a set of skills that he did not have before:

**Karen** So you're building your alliance?

**Jim** Yes sort of, sort of. But then the problem then's about who you can win over. And I would hope at some stage that the people that are converted or I am converting, will start getting into positions of power where they can actually influence, more than they can currently. I suppose there's some of that going on, and the other thing **I didn't start with that intention by any means, but it does strike me the more that I see that in many ways that's the only way that it's going to be achieved.**" (Jim Eddy, i/v 2)

In line with Jim's new experience of operating at senior levels he has developed a more sophisticated, complex and 'plausible' schema of power and change and as he implements behaviours based upon it and it seems to work, both the new schemas and the consequent behaviours become integrated into his existing repertoire.

Perhaps the most important point about visionary learning is that, as the learner is leading the changes and is in charge of his or her own learning many of the new behaviours adopted in pursuit of the vision will be ones that the learners are comfortable with. Many of the behaviours adopted by the visionary learner will be in accordance with their personal preferences already and will therefore be easier to

integrate into their behavioural repertoire. Often they will not have to venture too much outside their comfort zone.<sup>16</sup>

#### ***9.4.iii Visionary Learning –The Behavioural Lag***

Visionary learning shares similar characteristics to adaptive learning in terms of the behavioural lag. Whenever the learner experiences dissonance a similar transitional phase between schema change and behavioural change occurs. This is when new behaviours are ‘re-framed’ to fit into the learner’s value set. Jim Eddy, for example, experiences dissonance with regards to politics and operating at senior levels. At the beginning of the year, Jim was somewhat dismissive of those whom he called his “elders and betters”. He had given up on rising any further in the organisation because he associated rising in the hierarchy with ‘politics’ – in his mind, deference and fawning. Politics was something therefore that was inimical to his values and self concept. However, having developed his vision, this notion was blocking his ability to influence at high levels in the organisation. Jim was stuck in the transitional phase of change – recognising the changes in his environment but not sure whether he wanted to change his behaviour to such an extent that it was out of line with his values. The chat we had enabled Jim to see politics in a much more positive light in line with his values and style. Having reframed ‘politics’ where it is more like “guerrilla warfare”, his “elders and betters” are reframed either as “dinosaurs” or “strategic thinkers”. He then moves on to the experimental phase, trying out new behaviours to see what works – lobbying, influencing, presenting to large audiences, getting onto key committees etc.

This transition is the same as that experienced by John Gray:

- ◆ wariness of adopting a course of action out of line with one’s values
- ◆ reframing the schema to make it more in line with one’s values
- ◆ committing to changing one’s behaviour based upon the new schema.

A new role requires new behaviours based upon certain schemas (politics, influencing, selling). One’s existing perception of these schemas creates dissonance

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<sup>16</sup> This may simply be a function of the sample however.

if they carry inimical values. One learns to ‘reframe’ the schema so that it is based upon one’s own value set before one changes one’s behaviour.

Whilst all this is happening there can be a considerable ‘behavioural lag’.

## ***9.5 Behaviour Change in the Context of Dissonant Learning***

### ***9.5.i Dissonant Learning and the Behavioural Lag***

By now it will be apparent that dissonant learning differs from adaptive and visionary learning with regards to behavioural change primarily due to the fact that dissonant learning involves a very long transitional phase before behaviour change is committed to. It often takes some time before people even understand the nature of the changes in the environment let alone go on to recognise the need for personal change. The rapid assimilation and acceptance of changes in the environment leading to changes in schemas and goals that characterises visionary and adaptive learning does not take place with dissonant learning. The change is an onslaught and has to be understood and grappled with in a way that protects and enhances one’s self esteem as opposed to damaging and undermining it. This is not easy when often the change denies values and goals that are central to one’s identity.

We have already seen that the behavioural lag can be broken down into four phases. We will now examine those phases in more depth and look at them as follows:

#### **The Behavioural Lag**

- ◆ the reality phase: do I need to change
- ◆ the identity phase: do I want to change
- ◆ the capability phase: can I change
- ◆ the ‘action’ phase : I will change

### ***9.5.ii The Behavioural Lag and The Reality Phase: do I need to change?***

When looking at behaviour change within dissonant learning the first phase is primarily focused on ‘do I need to change’. I term this ‘the reality phase’. This is



concerned with making sense of the changes in the environment in a way that helps to answer the question of ‘do I need to change?’. It comprises a lot of sensemaking and emotion, as the learner tries to resolve the dissonance around ‘what this all means’. The reality phase may manifest itself in terms of loss of self esteem, loss of energy, commitment and drive. However, high energy emotions such as anger may also be apparent. A lot of energy is devoted to sensemaking, trying to work out the appropriate meanings to attach to events. At the same time behaviour based upon the ‘stress’ response may be evident – as people sense their goals, values or self esteem are threatened they may respond with anger, fear or withdrawal. Changes in behaviour will therefore emerge as a result of this often tacit emotional learning. It is only once this phase has been negotiated successfully, and the learner is clear as to what schema seems best to represent ‘reality’, that the learner will begin to think about action.

The reality phase often ends with either the reconciliation of opposing schemas – a recognition that one schema seems more ‘plausible’ than another – or simple exhaustion, as one can no longer make sense of the confusion in one’s mind. In the latter case, learning is stalled until the learner can gain further energy to enter back into the dissonant fray. In the former case (which we have already explored extensively under schema change), once one schema seems to be confirmed, once the dissonance is reconciled in some way, there are clear implications for action. Kay now recognises that she is not going to achieve her goals of culture change in the organisation:

“Discussed feedback with KB...in some respects for other reasons I’ve got to the stage where I’m not sure if I really care what or how I’m perceived....**I really do need to take my destiny into my own hands, as I really do feel like a fish out of water in this business. Oh well, that’s my New Year’s resolution sorted!**” (Kay Mendes, December, my emphasis)

So too with Paul Richards. He realises that the reason he feels so uncomfortable with the organisation is not due to his incompetence but rather due to ‘job fit’. Having the notion of job fit implies that he needs to get a new job.

However, the ‘gap’ between the bedding in of a new or changed construct (the reality phase) and subsequently taking action based upon it (the ‘action’ phase) can take the

form of days, months or years. In between the reality and the action phase are the identity and capability phases.

***9.5.iii The Behavioural Lag – Identity, Capability and Action: Do I want to change? Can I change? Will I change?***

On entering the next phase of transition the learner will have a new schema implying a change in behaviour is required. But they will not necessarily act on this schema. Why? There appear to be many dynamics operating at this stage all affecting when and how the new schema will be acted upon.

Let us look at Steve Black's behavioural change. In Steve's case we see quite clearly how he resolves the reality phase. He has been going through a lot of disconfirmation at SS. He feels that he is not recognised or valued and the company is moving in a direction that is out of line with his personal values. A schema around the short term profit orientation of the company (vs. longer term, growth and people orientation) is growing in his mind. His tacit change of behaviour due to the continual disconfirmation is noticed by his peers. One of them writes on the 360 feedback:

“Steve changed a lot during his last 12 months with SS; He was clearly not happy and felt underpaid and undervalued. This resulted in a much more pessimistic outlook on work and the company in general.” (Colleague of Steve Black – 360 feedback)

So Steve starts to go through the reality phase where he experiences a lack of support and a tacit change in emotional orientation together with the development of a new negative schema about the company. Much of this learning however is not consciously recognised and Steve still asserts that the company is good to work for.

This begins to change in September when a key event is construed in such a way as to mark a major shift in his emotional orientation towards the company and reinforces the new schema about the company ('the company does not value loyalty nor does it value me'). At this point Steve comes out of the reality phase and goes into the next phases (identity, capability and action):

***Excerpt from Steve Black's Learning Biography***

*At the end of September Steve makes reference to an important event in the company's history. A competitor based in the same business park, advertises equivalent jobs at higher salaries. A large number of people leave the company:*

*"A lot of people seem to be leaving because of better pay outside. Safety Management Dept. staff seem to have been offered £1000 to £2000 pay rise to stay with SS. I could have left 2 years ago for a much better salary as I was head hunted. The cost of loyalty to a company I guess. Think I need to apply for some jobs to see what I am worth. If this is how the company is going to manage pay it may be better to work elsewhere." (Steve Black, September)*

*There appears to be in this entry, a sense that Steve feels that he is not valued enough by the company. This is one of Steve's most important values: personal recognition. He refers to this a lot in his second interview when explaining why he left the organisation. His peers are being offered higher salaries, a head hunter offered him a higher salary that he turned down out of 'loyalty to his company' and yet the company simply blocks his goals, offends his values, undermines his hopes and pays him less than he could get elsewhere. This is what Scientific Solutions offers him in return for his loyalty.*

*This event seems to have played a key role in Steve's learning. It has powerfully reinforced his schema of what the company stands for. It has demonstrated the implications of that schema for staff - poor management and people not being valued. It has demonstrated the implications of that schema for Steve: he is not valued; the company takes advantage of his loyalty. It has generated anger. It has demonstrated again the usefulness of his values set as a key schema for making sense of events. A clearer picture is now building up:*

*the company puts short term financial goals over long term growth  
the future looks bleak for the company*

***This blocking of his goals leads Steve to conclude that he needs to get a job elsewhere.***

*the company puts short term financial goals over staff issues*

*the company does not value things like loyalty, team spirit (all central to Steve's values)*

*the company does not value me*

***This undermining of his values leads Steve to conclude he wants to get a job elsewhere.***

*Hence the beginnings of his behaviour change is signalled by a new goal - find out what he would be worth in the market i.e. 'can he find a job elsewhere?'*

### ***October to February***

*October is interesting in that Steve experiences a good event that generates excitement and enthusiasm. He is given permission to attend a conference, enjoys the experience, discovers there is work available in an area of interest to him and comes back from the conference with another growth idea. This positive experience gives him more optimism about the future (very much in the way we have seen in the chapter on emotional learning – a positive reinforcement generating a positive emotional orientation through simple processing) :*

*“Need to try to be more positive about the future.” (Steve Black, October diary)*

*This comment gives us some clue as to how Steve is feeling throughout this sensemaking experience. As his schema are confirmed, he does not necessarily feel happy about the way in which he is making sense of events. He would prefer to be positive about the future. **Although he knows he needs to leave he is still probably feeling apprehensive about the future and conflicted about his desire to leave – does he really want to leave?** The beginning of October brings a new found optimism that stimulates him to resurrect the growth concept (does the high self esteem help lead to more positive, goal oriented behaviour?). He submits a new idea for the growth process. Can his old schema still be correct? Is the management committed to growth?*

*Unfortunately October seems to confirm Steve's new schema that he is not valued:*

*“It would appear that because I had an unsuccessful idea I was not taken seriously on the new growth idea” (Steve Black, October)*

*Finally, a senior manager makes a presentation that introduced another new schema:*

*“appeared to understand the main problems but did not appear to have any commitment to do anything about the main problem of morale. More people are leaving.” (Steve Black, October)*

*This new schema (managers understand but are not committed to do anything about the problems) is important because it carries implications about the future - nothing will change. **It is at this point Steve applies for his first job interview. He has finally been impelled to act on his new schemas, emotional orientation and new goal. The learning cycle has resulted in changed behaviour.***

*So is there a reason that Steve acts at this particular point in the learning process? At this point we can see that every one of Steve’s goals and values has been comprehensively undermined. This has led to unhappiness, frustration, low self esteem and resentment. Both his blocked goals and his undermined values play a role in leading him to leave the organisation:*

*“I was not particularly happy with the sort of work I was doing (**goals and values**) and I was pretty fed up with it all (**unhappiness**), I seem to be spending a lot of time and effort earning a lot of money for the company and seeing very little reward for it (**values - personal recognition**).*

***Karen** So, initially, it was a monetary dissatisfaction?*

***Steve** Yes, yes, very much so and a feeling of insecurity (**goals and values - security**) because we were told that our jobs were going to be assessed against what the market said we were worth. Now I knew, I was fairly confident that my value to the organisation was more than I was being paid (**values - personal recognition**) but what concerned me was that I didn’t trust Scientific Solutions (**values - openness and honesty plus a history of having his own values undermined**) to do an honest exercise on this so I had a feeling that there was an unwritten agenda to pin people back so, at that point, I wanted to have some ammunition to argue that my market value was actually higher than maybe they’d thought it was” (Steve Black, i/v 2)*

*So at this point then we can see that what has led to Steve changing his behaviour is:*

- 1. the formation of three new schemas formed by the undermining of*

*Steve's values:*

*the organisation's values differ from mine (short term financial vs. long term)*

*I am not valued by senior management in this organisation*

*the future looks highly uncertain for the organisation.*

2. *a change in emotional orientation from "happy" to "depressed" and "unhappy", from loyal to uncommitted*
3. *A growing sense of the need to act in order to protect his financial interests (finding out his market value)*
4. *a shift in attention. At the beginning he focuses on growth and deployment. By the end he has shifted to looking at his relationship with the company (how he is valued, what the company stands for, what the management will do etc) and also the external world (the market, other employers)*
5. *The generation of a new goal: to find out what he is worth and what else is available*

*However this is not the end of Steve's learning. These changes are in a way 'forcing Steve out'. They are not acting as positive and optimistic visions for the future - 'attracting him away', hence he is still nervous about the future. Steve ends his diaries by saying that he **does not want to leave Scientific Solutions but at this stage he feels he has to**. What finally impels him to act is the combination of the emotional consequences of the above - unhappiness, depression, fear and insecurity and lack of hope and the prognosis of the future based upon his new schema. As we have mentioned, the other ingredient in his decision making process is his self concept/self esteem. He knows he needs to leave, he wants to leave but can he leave? Is he valued elsewhere?*

*His next learning experience addresses this issue.*

## **Phase 2      The Change in his Self Concept, Self Esteem and Personal Goals**

*The one incident that seems to have made a major impact on Steve's self esteem and confidence is his attendance at a recruitment fair. This was impelled by his growing sense of insecurity at the company's future together with his distrust of the motives of*

*senior management. Driven by the need to protect his interests he attends the recruitment fair with a set of expectations that are comprehensively undermined.*

*Steve describes the experience:*

*“they were having a recruitment fair in Manchester so I thought well, it won't do me any harm to get my CV up to date and go along and talk to a few people so I went along and spoke to three companies R, D and B because they were the only ones that were in the area that I was interested in and I took my CV along and I was absolutely knocked over by the response I got, because I expected to get some - 'yes, we're very interested, we'll put it through the process and we'll see' but I got a very 'wow, gosh we're desperate for people with these sort of skills and these sort of qualifications', so from feeling undervalued by Scientific Solutions plc, I suddenly saw the contrast between the way I seem to be valued outside and I got offered interviews for all three jobs” (Steve Black, i/v 2)*

*The contrast between his expectations and the reality is so great he is “knocked over” by the response. The contrast between how he is valued outside and how he is valued inside plays to one of his most important values (personal recognition). This is an excellent example of learning by contrast or comparison. His self concept changes entirely (“I am highly valued”), his self esteem is boosted, he becomes a lot more secure and confident in himself:*

*“I keep thinking if all else fails, then I could always find a job back up here somewhere because I was pleasantly surprised how buoyant the labour market was, very, very pleasantly surprised. I could be unfortunate and could end up trying to find another job at a time when we were falling into a depression cycle but you can't live your life on what might happen in a few years time, you just don't know.” (Steve Black, i/v 2)*

*So from being concerned about job security in year one and having mapped out a predictable and safe future until retirement, he is now more accepting of the uncertainties of the future feeling secure that whatever happens he could survive.*

*Hence his whole emotional orientation towards himself and his future changes:*

*“I feel more confident these days I think. You know I think that's probably part of the reason why I've come to the point where I'm actually leaving. Because I've always felt too uncertain too unsure about outside and how I'd be valued. I think in a lot of ways being **pushed** by this pay and grading*

*process to find out what I'm worth outside has you know given me the confidence that **people do value me** and I suppose that's partly because Scientific Solutions plc has undervalued the staff so much recently that people do feel undervalued and its not until you actually take a you know a step outside the box that you realise that that's not the case...." (Steve Black, i/v 2)*

*"I find that my confidence levels are improving. and I suppose that's the big change really.*

*Karen and you'd put that down to having gone to that careers fair*

*Steve I think so yes. I think its partly that and....I'm leaving tomorrow and people are still asking me about things still relying on me to do things you know and eh what are they going to do when I've left. That's their problem.*

*Karen What else would you put it down to?*

*Steve: I don't know. I don't know. I think it's just feeling more valued. I think its also just knowing how much you're valued by customers and things you know. I mean in the last 12 months, you know, when I've told everybody that I'm leaving everybody wants to keep in touch with me you know very nice letters back off people saying you know keep in touch I've really enjoyed working with you and all this so you know so" (my emphases) (Steve Black, i/v 2)*

*There are a number of things we can see in this passage.*

*1. There is a push and a pull effect in terms of making him leave. We have seen the push effect above (based on changed schemas and emotional orientation towards the company). This was the push of negative emotions (depression, unhappiness, insecurity, fear, lack of hope). However the pull effect is also important in terms of the fact that he feels confident enough to deal with the change. The pull effect provides positive emotions (pleasant surprise, self esteem, happiness, optimism) and hence makes him more assertive in seeking the right job vs. simply looking for any job that enables him to escape. The pull effect makes him demand a certain salary as opposed to accept what he is offered.*

*2. The company undervaluing him has not only affected his schema of the company it has affected his self concept. Over time he tacitly accepted that the company's view of him was founded in some sort of truth. As he says, it is only when he steps outside the world created by Scientific Solutions into a new world that he realises his views are a product of the former and do not reflect the latter.*



3. *He also states that it was insecurity that stopped him from stepping outside of this world beforehand. This demonstrates the important role of fear in the inhibition of learning. It is almost as if Steve did not look outside due to a fear that his low self esteem would be confirmed. The risk of finding out how he is valued externally would be that his self esteem would be reduced even further. This was a risk he was not prepared to take. We see this pattern fairly frequently: changing behaviour is often the result of a risk assessment and occurs only when perceptions or emotional orientation regarding the risk change. (perceptions of the downside are reduced or the upside are increased).*

*Ironically however, in order to develop a new self concept and self esteem Steve had to be pushed by fear, depression, unhappiness, lack of hope and mistrust of management into stepping “outside the box”. However having done this we now have the final piece of the jigsaw:*

*I need to leave*

*I want to leave*

*I can leave.*

\* \* \*

However, having identified that he could leave (he was even offered a new job with higher pay by a new company) Steve still did not leave! Let us see how he eventually arrives at his decision:

“I was almost on the point of thinking well, if we win that work I’ll stay, I’ll do that, that’ll get me to the point where I’m so close to retirement but I can sort of just see my years out and hopefully get out early....and I wanted to try and be open and honest as I’ve always been and when I got offered this job I mentioned it to my boss...and I made it quite clear that I hadn’t made up my mind but if they wanted to say anything that was going to change my views, then they would need to do it fairly soon because once I’d made my decision that would be it ..... so I sort of said if they wanted to do anything to persuade that they should do it sooner rather than later - the first thing that happened I was talking to a friend of mine in another part of the organisation who commented that he’d heard people saying that the management was saying that I was trying to blackmail the organisation....

**Karen:** So how did you respond when you heard that comment then?

**Steve:** I was just very angry, I thought - right OK if that's the way they want to play it, I won't be open and honest anymore, I will treat them the way they treated me, so that's the way I tend to be with SS anyway, it's not my style, it's not my natural way of working but... (Steve Black, i/v 2)

Steve finally acts upon his new schema impelled by anger! Having gone through the recognition of 'I need to leave', 'I want to leave', 'I can leave' it is only once he has a final push that he decides 'I will leave'. And this, as he openly admits, is because there is still a desire inside that says:

"I'm so close to retirement but I can sort of just see my years out and hopefully get out early" (Steve Black, i/v 2)

There is a part of him that does not want to leave! This passage gives us some idea as to the complexity of forces operating on the impulse to act. Not only do we have to have a schema that implies we should act, we also need to reduce dissonance in the following areas:

need to act – how important is this schema? what are the implications for me?  
do I really need to act upon it?

want to act – what will I lose by acting on this schema? What will I leave behind – security, friends, recognition etc.? Do I really want to act?

able to act – will I be able to survive in a new environment? Am I really competent? Will people accept and value me? Am I good enough? Am I able to act on this new schema?

will act – can I be bothered to go through the emotional upheaval inevitably involved in acting on this schema? How bad is the current situation? How intrusive is my current unhappiness? Will I bother to act?

Once this dissonance is resolved, action can be quick and sure, as we have already seen in Paul's decision:

“I had a free Saturday in May...I just sat down, and worked out how much I needed to live on and this, that and the other, and I came to the conclusion that I was actually quite comfortable to take, maybe up to a year off...and having thought about it on the Saturday, I drafted a resignation letter and popped it onto somebody’s desk on the Monday morning.” (Paul Richards, i/v 2)

We can see why this form of dissonant learning can lead to sudden, radical changes in behaviour. Unlike adaptive or visionary learning, dissonant learning involves the working out of a lot of dissonance in the head! There may be small experiments - such as Steve attending a recruitment fair to see what he is worth or Paul not bothering to do a good job but pursuing his own interests at work – but often these are small imperceptible changes. It is almost as if the experimentation and integration phases take place inside the head and once they are completed the consequent behaviour change simply appears, so it seems, out of the blue!

\* \* \*

Steve’s example of behaviour change offers us a fascinating insight into the dynamics underlying the behavioural lag. Having gone through an exhausting process of identifying a more accurate and predictive schema of reality, which is out of line with our own preferences, desires and values, we then go through an exhausting process of working out what we really want, whether we can achieve it and whether we want to take the risk of acting on it. In going through this process we discover that we want many contradictory things, we are never quite sure as to our competence in the new field and will always feel uneasy about the risk involved in changing behaviour. Furthermore, there are many contradictory forces – some forces push us out of our current patterns of behaviour. The experience of stress and depression in our current situation force us to contemplate change, often against our will. Other forces however, attract us away from our behavioural patterns – offering a vision of a brighter future if we decide to change. The ‘behavioural lag’ is quite simply a time of cognitive and emotional turmoil, which often ends in physical, mental and emotional exhaustion which may be spread over a number of years.

## 9.6 *Conclusions*

The dynamics of behavioural change are complex. However there does appear to be a pattern that underlies much of what we have explored in this chapter. We shall attempt to outline that pattern here.

Firstly, much, though not all, of the behaviour change we have explored has been conscious behaviour change. That is not intended to diminish the importance of unconscious behaviour change but rather reflects the methodology of the diary as a means of tracking learning. However, we have seen from the 360 feedback that people do change their behaviour as a result of changes in emotional orientation, often leading to changes in behaviour that they do not consciously choose or want. We also saw that unplanned and spontaneous new/changed behaviours are more likely with visionary and, sometimes, adaptive learning where self confidence is higher and the benefits of behaviour change often outweigh the risks.

We should bear in mind then that much of what follows is focused on conscious behaviour change.

1. Behaviour change involves risk. It is the first external manifestation of learning, much of which has already taken place in internal schemas and emotional orientation. Behaviour change involves consequences and feedback from the external world. This could indicate that the learner has failed to learn what is necessary to survive in the external world. There will always be a degree of anxiety involved in behaviour change.
2. As a result, behaviour change is rarer than change in emotional orientation and schemas. It often involves a 'lag' where the learner builds up 'courage' and 'readiness' to face the consequences of the new or changed behaviour.
3. If people see a concrete benefit in changing their behaviour they will be more ready to undertake the risk. As a result of the risks involved, people often change their behaviour (or adopt new behaviours) consciously, cautiously and planfully<sup>17</sup>. Even when they are more spontaneous in their behaviour change (as with visionary learning), it is often focused consciously on achieving a predetermined plan or goal.

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<sup>17</sup> This is partly a function of the diary method however.

4. Changes in behaviour often follow prior changes in emotional orientation and/or schemas and goals. This is likely to be the case where people have committed to new roles and/or challenges that require new and/or changed behaviours to succeed. In these cases people will have changed their goals, emotional orientations and schemas in relation to their roles and will be ready and willing to change their behaviour to meet the challenge.

5. Where people do change their behaviour unconsciously, perhaps without prior conscious changes in schema, is when they have experienced a tacit change in emotional orientation – say to themselves or to their work goals. Over time, as their hope for their goals dwindles, people become less motivated and committed. Alternatively, as they become more and more successful, they become more confident and take more risks.

5. Once a learner has recognised the need to change his or her behaviour (via prior learning) there is often a delay or ‘behavioural lag’ before the new or changed behaviours are implemented. This transitional period consists of a number of dynamics:

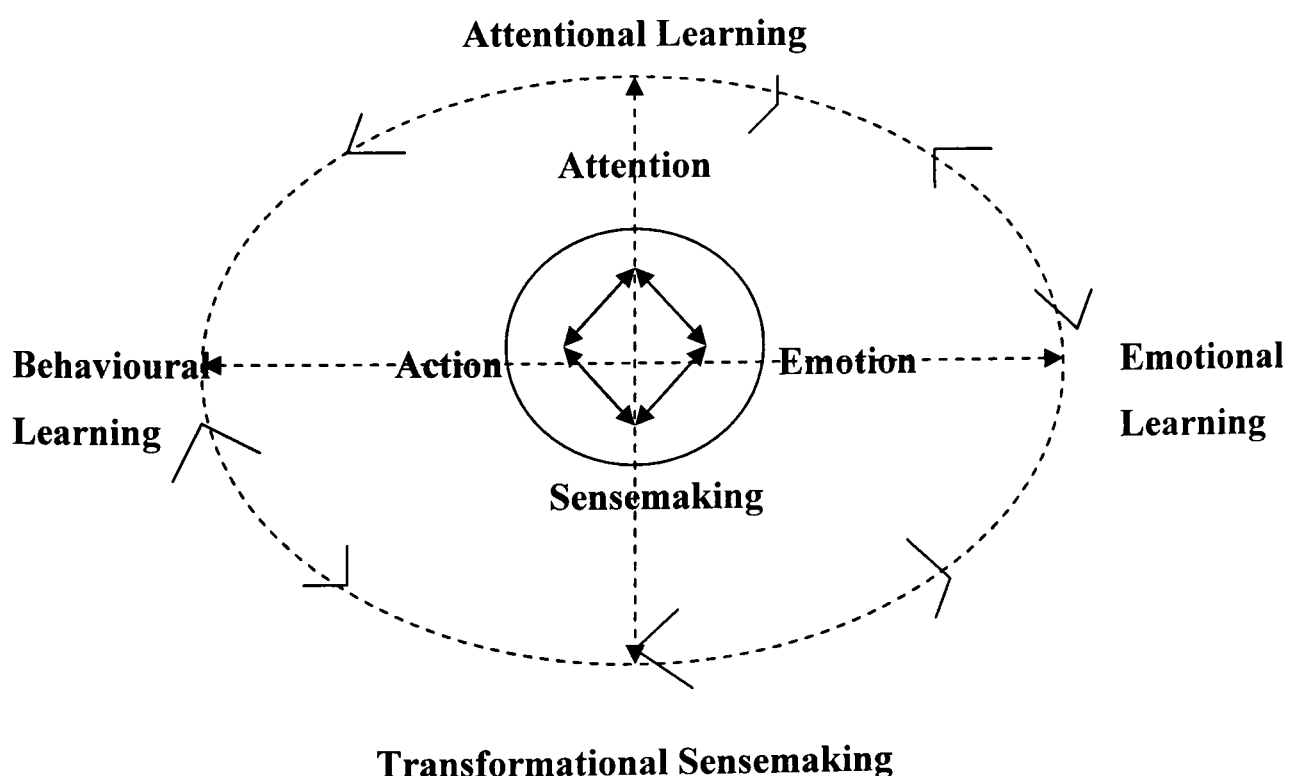
- ◆ the movement from – I need to change, I am able to change, I want to change, I will change;
- ◆ conflicting needs battling out for dominance e.g. the need for security inhibiting behavioural change vs. the need for self esteem supporting change;
- ◆ the need to resolve any remnants of dissonance in order to ensure that the actions being taken are the ‘right’ ones;
- ◆ the ‘will’ to change often requires an additional momentum – a ‘cue’ that boosts self esteem such as a piece of good feedback; a ‘get out’ construct that enables the interpretation of the situation in terms that does not undermine self esteem; the emergence of a new goal to replace the old goal; or a ‘cue’ that serves to undermine the credibility of the old (non-change) alternative. The cue often acts as a positive force, attracting the learner to the new future and counteracts the fact that many of the forces acting so far have been negative, pushing the learner out of his or her existing patterns;

6. Having reconciled the dynamics underlying the transitional period the learner is ready to experiment with the new or changed behaviours.

7. Having tried out some new or changed behaviours the learner assesses what behaviours feel comfortable to integrate into his or her normal behavioural repertoire. The role of values, goals, self concept and psychological 'comfort' will be important in assessing what behaviours to adopt permanently.

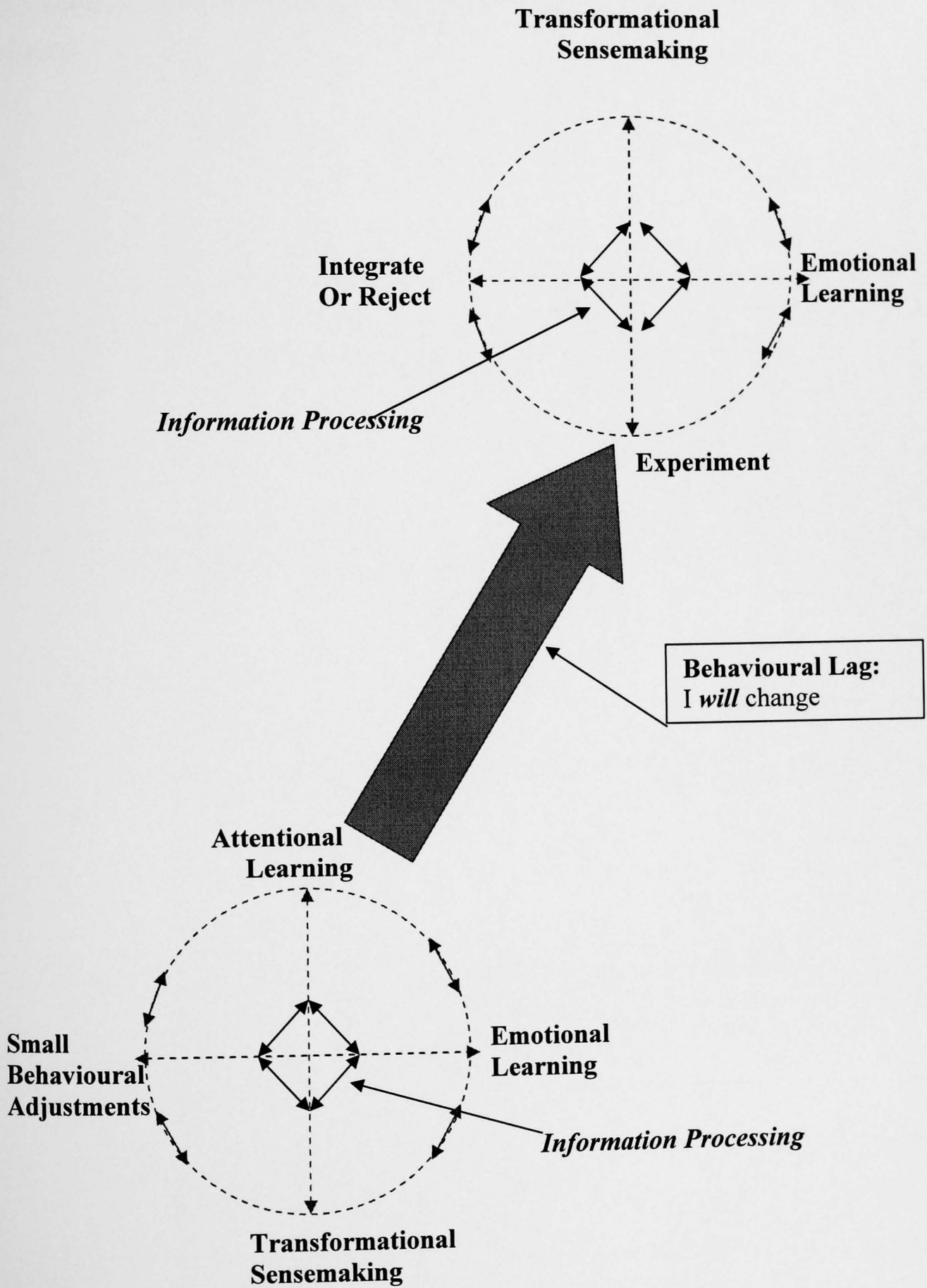
8. Finally, from what we have seen, changing behaviour is more costly, difficult and slow than adopting new behaviours. Change in behaviour often involves acting against one's natural preferences, values and desires. Sometimes, as with Kay Mendes, people can restrain their natural impulses because they see the benefits in terms of achieving valued goals. However, it is rare to see people so committed to changing their behaviour. Often people change their behaviour because they perceive they 'have to' rather than because they 'want to'. Behavioural change is less likely to be incorporated into long term behavioural routines unless it sustains personal goals, values and talents.

Given what we know about behavioural change, how does this affect our learning model? Originally our model looked as follows:



However, this model does not do justice to the ‘behavioural lag’ and the considerable time delay that appears to characterise major behavioural change. In fact we have seen that there are two stages that occur in learning that might be represented by two cycles. The first stage involves paying attention to the cue and making sense of it very much as we have described previously. This might be termed the transitional phase where people spend all their time and energy engaging with questions involving self-esteem, values, identity and competency. At any stage during this cycle the temptation will always be to revert to defensive responses such as ‘giving up’, withdrawing, playing victim, cynicism, denial, refusal to listen. During this stage, the individual learner may make small adjustments in behaviour but may also recognise that he or she needs to change his or her behaviour in a more profound way. A behavioural lag then occurs whilst the learner decides that she ought to change, she can change, she wants to change and eventually that she will change. When s/he decides to change we enter a second phase of learning. This is the experimental stage. This involves experimenting with different behaviours to see what works. The learner will try out new behaviours and experience an emotional reaction. S/he will reflect upon how the behaviours worked and either integrate them, reject them or continue to experiment with them. Eventually, all those behaviours that do not feel comfortable and do not appear to work are rejected. Those behaviours that feel right are finally integrated into the learner’s behavioural repertoire in the final, integrating stage. This could be depicted as follows (we have simplified the cycles for the sake of clarity):

# The Learning Journey





However, whilst this model appears to represent much of what has been covered so far in this research, we still do not know enough about tacit incidental learning to see if it would conform to this model. This appears to be an area for potential further research.

## Chapter 10      Reflection on Method

### *10.1 Introduction*

Before going on to discuss the conclusions of the research we shall explore some of the limitations of the methodology that may impact on our findings. These come under three headings:

- ◆ the observer effect
- ◆ sample bias
- ◆ problems of measurement, validity and researcher bias

Having discussed the limitations of the methodology we will then go on to look at the conclusions of the research in the next chapter.

### *10.2 The Observer Effect*

One aspect of the methodology that must be addressed is the role of the method in generating the phenomenon it is designed to measure. There is no doubt that both I, as researcher, and the diaries as method played a large role in the learning of many of the participants. We can see this from excerpts from the diaries and interviews. We will look at three different influences:

- ◆ the role of the researcher
- ◆ the role of the diaries
- ◆ the role of participation in the project as a whole

#### *a. The Role of the Researcher*

As a researcher I was aware that I was having an impact upon people's learning. This manifested itself in two forms. Weick identifies how 'mere presence' can provoke learning:

“Presence of other people can alter individual performance by raising levels of arousal” (Weick, 1993)

The idea that there was someone who was reading their diaries must have affected the participants. It probably encouraged them to identify learning which otherwise might

have gone unnoticed or even to generate learning which otherwise might not have happened! However, I was also aware that my interventions were more proactive than this. With some people I acted as a coach and a facilitator:

“Email to boss: Putting my money where my mouth is...felt very brave she didn't take me up this time but might another time! Scary if she does! Positioning myself better (thanks Karen!!)” (Alex Gray, April)

“There was that anecdote with a woman who was sort of the exact opposite, *your* anecdote, those sort of things are really powerful, difficult things that were powerful were very reinforcing” (Rob Tyler, i/v 2 - my emphasis)

“thank you for letting me take part in your project, I found it invaluable. It made me take a good look at myself and how I interacted with my colleagues in the work place. I feel that I am a better person for having taken part and hope soon that I will be able to say I knew Dr Blakeley” (Kay Mendes – email after the project had ended)

“My decision to put (the depot) on the map has worked. I've done more presentations to GMs and Directors in the last 3 months than we've done in the last 3 years. Thank you (I think) for the chat we had around power, I'm now on 2 key groups although I'm not sure I consciously went looking for this but then you know my views on things that you wish for.” (Jim Eddy, July)

There are many examples of how my intervention helped facilitate a participant's learning. However, whilst this means that my methodology might have over-emphasised the role of coaching, training and reflection in the workplace I believe that it also highlighted how these processes operate to facilitate learning. Since coaching, training and reflection are a part of many organisational development systems I believe that introducing them where they might otherwise not have occurred simply served to highlight how they worked in practice.

My role as coach did not distort learning, it simply facilitated it. As a result the research probably over-emphasises the amount of learning that would have taken place had the project not occurred.

**b. *The Diary Method***

I asked each participant how they felt that completing the diary affected them.

“I think, what I have done is instead of just thinking, Oh I don’t like this or I’ve got to be careful, I think well *why* don’t I like this and it’s actually made me think about my reactions to certain situations, and I think that’s probably been one of the biggest aspects of this, it’s almost self analysis, OK I have that feeling but why did I have that feeling and to sit back and certainly writing it down, you get well that was fairly obvious.” (Paul Richards)

”it did make me think really about what I’d learnt and also about just what had happened, not even thinking about learning but just reflecting on things” (Rob Tyler)

“I think when you keep a record day by day almost and then look back over it you can start to see a pattern in things that perhaps you don’t do in a different time window... When you look at them in a broader time scale and stop to see the trends they – it accentuates the gradient in your like, you know you suddenly start saying ‘oh this is bloody ridiculous –‘ it’s getting worse all the time or you can see well yes you know things are better so I think it’s – you’re not going to see many things stay pretty much as they are, by the nature of things it’s either going to get worse or better or your perception of them probably.” (Steve Black)

“No well it was the fact that it did make me think about what I’d learnt, so as I said because I think generally I’m just the sort of person that absorbs information as I go along, the act of having to do the diary actually made me think about what were the bits of information, what were the important things, out of all this, sort of constant stream of information and activity or whatever,

and just the day to day busyness of life, what were the things that were more significant than others so it did make me think about those, which I wouldn't have done, other than because I was writing the diary.” (Jim Barnes)

“I think it gave me the opportunity to sit down and reflect which I might do on a day to day basis – how did I perform. You wouldn't necessarily get a chance to do it otherwise and because you were literally sitting there thinking about what you'd learnt, you had to think about it, I think the sort of things you wouldn't have necessarily thought of. I suppose I did get that out of that – would I have dealt with that differently – apart from that aspect it was a total bind I found. Just finding the time to sit down and do it was really difficult.” (Ann Smart)

“so maybe in some ways that even actually helped me gain or keep a perspective on some of the things that were going on whereas I might have lost the perspective on it – it probably enabled me to keep more of a perspective on it...you can look at it and say you silly woman is it really that important, you know, it's like keeping a balance on it, because of hormones and everything throughout the month as you are going up and down and the rest of it sometimes you cry your bloody eyes out over nothing and other time you know, you're ok with things so I think, in some way, it helped focus on that - keeping the perspective on things. I suspect that is why a lot of people do diaries any way.” (Sally Peters)

So the diaries helped to generate the phenomenon under study – learning. It did this by:

- ◆ reminding people of incidents they may have forgotten
- ◆ focusing attention onto particular incidents – those that were more important or that they may have preferred to ignore
- ◆ causing people to examine and question their own emotions, perspectives and behaviours (self analysis)
- ◆ causing people to reflect on these incidents and analyse them – asking ‘why’

- ◆ helping them to see patterns and trends that they may otherwise have missed
- ◆ helping them to make sense of incidents in new, creative ways

This does have an important impact on the types of conclusions we can draw. It would appear that the method may have helped to over-emphasise the role of reflection and analysis in day-to-day learning. It was surprising the number of people who claimed that they rarely reflected upon their experience and that the process of reflecting for them was both novel and surprisingly enlightening:

“But I did quite enjoy just sitting back and thinking about things you know? Ah now I know why I did that because I learnt that that from previously or that’s where that quarter’s come in to help with some things, so I’m not really a fantastically reflective person, sit and think back, and so that just gave me a little bit of stop and think about it, so that was good.” (Sandy Simmonds)

“because it’s very difficult to reflect, and I couldn’t reflect daily because, if something happened to me, which clearly was going on during this change, I didn’t feel like doing anything” (Will Payne)

“So, yeah, as a person I reflect more.” (Rob Tyler)

In emphasising the role of reflection and analysis, it also under-emphasised the role of tacit learning:

“I’m sure there were a lot of things that – sort of under the surface – I probably absorbed rather than learnt if you like.” (Steve Black)

“over that 18 months working on that job, I did learn an awful lot of information, and it’s only now that I’ve got other jobs where I know I’m thinking to myself, ahh, we did something similar with the RAF, and I did get out that piece of work and I look at it and I realise that yes, you can do that now, I know I have picked up a lot and I have learnt things, so I’m probably the sort of person that just tends to pick up things as I go along” (Jim Barnes)

“I felt that was more just picking up information rather than learning.” (Mat

Steele)

“So I tend to reflect about things all the time, you know, just little things that happen through the day, big things I can think about, it’s just all going on in the subconscious all the time, I know it is. Because I get all my good ideas in the shower” (Jim Eddy)

Hence, not only does the diary generate the very thing it is designed to measure, it biases the study in terms of measuring reflection more easily than it does other forms of learning such as tacit, procedural learning.

c) *The Project as a Whole*

Perhaps the main impact of my interventions was that they served to over-estimate the prevalence of profound, transformational learning in the workplace:

“And as a result of being involved in this project, I’m much more likely to say, well I’m not interested, the reason I’m not concentrating on it is I’m not interested in it. Now what you do about it is another matter, but certainly the feeling that as it were, it was somehow up to me to generate some sort of artificially, some sort of interest and motivation, I no longer feel that.” (Paul Richards, i/v 2)

One wonders how Paul would have developed had it not been for his participation in the study. One of the most important new constructs that facilitated this change was the notion of individual differences (I introduced this at the beginning of the period). Whereas before Paul was desperately trying to fit into the new ‘model employee’ and not succeeding, he learned that his lack of success was not due to incompetence but a lack of fit between what the job required and what he wanted out of life. Would he have reached that conclusion had he not participated in the study? It is difficult to say. He certainly had been grappling with this issue for many years prior to his participation.

At the very least, participants’ learning was both facilitated and accelerated by the study and as a result, the study probably over-estimates both the ease and prevalence of transformational learning in the workplace.

### **10.3            *Sample Bias***

It is inevitable that there is a sample bias amongst the group of people who participated in my study. We have seen already that participants were generally more positive, more supportive of the change and possibly more career oriented than many who decided not to participate.

It occurred to me however, at a fairly late stage (i.e. when writing the final chapter) that there is a massive bias in this sample that probably limits its conclusions significantly. This bias reflects the fact that all the participants are in management/professional roles. They are all focused upon following their careers. None of them are in the caring professions or roles (nurses, teachers, counsellors, social workers). I wonder if the focus on pursuing personal goals and interests and the lack of empathy or concern for others reflects this strongly ambitious, task-focused sample.

To sum up, the sample is probably biased in favour of people who are positive, generally favourably disposed towards the organisation and relatively interested in self development and learning, although not all participants would fit this description. Again, this might lead to an over-emphasis in terms of how much people do learn in the workplace.

It is also a strongly task-focused, ambitious group who are pursuing professional or managerial careers. People in more caring type roles would probably differ in the psychological dynamics involved in their learning.

### **10.4            *Problems of Measurement, Validity and Researcher Bias***

The diary method favours conscious, articulated learning. However, many of the participants believed that much of their learning in the workplace was comprised of tacit learning. This study did not set out to capture tacit learning, although in some cases it has attempted to track tacit learning where it seemed important and viable to



do so (e.g. Tim Howes', Sally Peters', Charles King's and Alex Gray's learning biography). As a result some learning simply has not been captured.

In addition to not measuring certain forms of learning we have the problems of validity and reliability in measuring learning we did capture. As the methodology evolved, new constructs emerged that appeared to have explanatory power.

Constructs such as 'goals', 'self esteem', 'values', 'drives', 'dissonance' are all important for the final analysis but have all been derived simply from interviews, diaries and 360 feedback. This does raise a question mark around reliability and validity:

**a) *Errors of Rationalisation and Retrospection***

It may be that in finding a story in each person's learning biography I have over-emphasised the rationality and causality in what might have been a more random series of events. In retrospect we have a tendency to impose order where there was none and to make decisions seem inevitable when at the time there was no inevitability. In answer to this I would add that:

- ◆ the monthly diaries chart the individual making sense as events occur over time. In some cases people do make sense of events in ways that contradict earlier sensemaking as manifested in the diaries. However, this in itself is an interesting reflection of the learning process. I often highlight it in order to reveal the dynamics of learning beyond what people simply recall (cf Paul Richards' diary);
- ◆ people do construct stories and add retrospective order but this does not mean that the order did not exist. A number of the diarists claim that it is only in reflection that it is possible to see patterns (see section on 'effects of the diary'). The pattern is invisible when one is in the middle of it which does not mean that the pattern is not there!

**b) *Many explanations fit the data***

Whilst I have used a grounded approach to the data there may be many other explanations that fit the data. I am aware that I am bringing prior constructs,

preferences and biases to what I see even when using a more grounded approach and that these preferences are reflected in my learning biographies. However, as Runyan states:

“we would be suspicious if two individuals produced the same narrative account of a single life. This lack of total reliability is, however, not the same as no reliability, in that through a process of critical examination, it is possible to rigorously assess the evidence, inferences, generalizations, interpretations, and conclusions of narrative accounts” (1982:183)

As evidence of the flexibility in my approach I would claim that I started the research with a cognitive psychology bias and ended by taking more account of psychodynamic approaches. The bias in favour of cognitive psychology probably accounts for the greater focus on sensemaking at the expense of emotion and behaviour. In the final analysis, I believe that the learning biography approach is substantiated by the way in which it provides a strong analytical framework that makes sense of a number of individuals' learning and is also supported by the literature (as we shall see in the following section).

### ***c) Validity and Reliability of Constructs***

As a result of using a grounded approach constructs such as goals, values, drivers, dissonance, self esteem and attention emerged from the data. They were derived and measured using content analysis and cannot be said to be 'reliable' or 'valid' in a quantitative sense. This is important because we are not using content analysis simply to derive a set of constructs important for the individual participant. We are using it to derive explanatory and predictive constructs that we apply across a range of individual participants. Moreover, we have based a whole methodology – the learning biography – on these constructs.

***Hence in defence of my methodology I would add:***

### ***d) Theory Building not Theory Testing***

In defence of my approach I would add that the research is focused on theory building rather than theory testing. This raises questions about what predictions we might be

able to make as a result of the theory being built (Runyan, 1982: 186). We will come back to this later.

***e) Using A Number of Methods – Comparing Content Analyses of Attention, Goals and Learning Outcomes to Support Theory***

The method for tracking attention patterns is a classic content analysis that could be replicated by other researchers. In addition attention patterns were compared to stated goals and learning outcomes, which appeared to support a linkage between attention, goals and learning. This linkage however, was purely based upon a visual assessment not upon statistical analysis. Nevertheless, the cross-case comparison does provide support for the eventual theory that emerges from the data. Again, whilst not conclusive, this does provide an alternative approach to ‘testing’ the constructs.

***e) Another Form of Validity – Feedback from Participants***

I was able to show my learning biographies to four participants, all of whom testify to the validity of the method and conclusions reached (see appendix 4).

***f) The Validity of Discourse as Opposed to Questionnaires***

I was often able to identify constructs (such as people’s goals and values) as they were revealed unconsciously or incidentally as they spoke. Values for example, appeared when I asked people about managers they admired or disliked or when I asked them about choices they made and dilemmas they faced. In many respects, values revealed through the process of natural talk and decision making are more reflective of a person’s true values than a rigorous questionnaire that assumes we can consciously articulate our values (Argyris, 1976, 1982, differentiates between espoused theories and theories-in-use).

***g) Volume of Data both Intra-Case and Inter-Case***

What also helps to substantiate the findings however is simply the amount of data that one can provide to support one’s conclusions. When looking at goals for example, references to goals can be found throughout the interviews, diaries and 360 feedback. When making claims regarding ‘needs’ or ‘values’ I have always tried to provide a large number of supporting quotes, so that I am not relying simply on a one-off remark but a substantial ‘theme’ that runs throughout a person’s data. Moreover,

having identified goals, values and needs for one person, the explanatory power of these constructs appeared to be sustained when applied to all the participants.

#### *h) Significant Learning Outcomes*

We tended to capture evidence of behavioural change when it was most obvious (such as a person leaving their organisation). As a result we were analysing instances of significant behaviour change and were able to observe the dynamics that contributed to this in some detail. We can therefore conclude that these dynamics contribute towards significant behaviour change rather than temporary behaviour change that dies out over a period of time (such as might have resulted from the motivational effects of a training course for example).

In defence of the methodology I would propose then that the theory that has been derived appears substantiated by:

- ◆ the number of diverse cases it provides plausible explanations for
- ◆ the diverse sources of validation for example in terms of feedback from participants on the learning biographies, a quantitative link between stated goals, learning outcomes and attention patterns, evidence from the diaries and interviews themselves
- ◆ support from the literature (we will explore this more fully in the next chapter)

### **10.5 Conclusions Regarding Method**

Reflecting on this chapter, we can see that the methodology appears to have:

- ◆ over-emphasised the role of analytical reflection
- ◆ exaggerated the amount of learning taking place
- ◆ under-emphasised the role of tacit learning
- ◆ focused on the role of independent and individual as opposed to social and interactive learning
- ◆ reflected a bias towards cognition reflecting the researcher's own preferences

At the same time however it has:

- ◆ evolved to reflect a deep connection with the data, overcoming previous prejudices and biases on the part of the researcher
- ◆ generated new explanatory constructs that reflect that connectedness with the data
- ◆ generated a theory that appears applicable over a wide range of individual circumstances
- ◆ used a variety of techniques to substantiate that theory – from narrative to content analysis
- ◆ validated individual learning biographies via feedback from the participants.

Whilst it is recognised that the methodology contains limitations, particularly with respect to the role of tacit learning, it is maintained that the theory generated is rooted in the data, appears plausible, has practical application and, as we shall see in the next chapter, is substantiated by the literature.

# **Chapter 11      Conclusions and Discussion**

## ***11.1 Introduction***

This research was rooted in a problem. By the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, whilst academics and practitioners continued to refer to a variety of learning theories, none had escaped significant criticism. Experiential learning theory appeared to be the most influential (Kayes, 2002; Reynolds, 1998; Vince, 1996) but had come under sustained and powerful attack. In particular it was said to be over-cognitive, too sequential, lacking an understanding of the process of reflection, conflating reflection with learning, naïve in its humanist underpinnings, ignoring aspects of tacit learning and intuition, lacking an understanding of the impact of power relations and ignoring the social and cultural context of learning.

This research was intended to address this gap in the literature. Its purpose being to generate a new theory of learning which could overcome some of the weaknesses of current extant theories.

Let's first of all summarise this new theory of learning.

## ***11.2 A New Theory of Experiential Learning***

We have seen above that learning is difficult, complex, threatening and unpredictable. This research started out by problematising learning – instead of assuming learning is part of living, we investigated the circumstances under which adults would eventually undertake this often painful and difficult process.

The research suggests that adults learn in order to meet specific needs i.e. learning is predominantly instrumental.<sup>18</sup> Learning is driven by four main needs – the needs to achieve a goal; the need to build self esteem; the need to live in accordance with one's idealistic values (the need for integrity or consistency); the need for

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<sup>18</sup> Some confusion does arise when we talk about intrinsic learning where needs are satisfied simply by learning for learning's sake. Some adults learn because they have high curiosity or mastery needs. Are these people adopting an instrumental approach to learning – learning in order to fulfil needs for mastery – or are they learning purely for the love of learning? Clearly, with intrinsic learning the notion of instrumental learning is less meaningful.

psychological comfort. These needs overlap and sometimes support each other and sometimes conflict.

At any one time, then we are all striving to meet these needs. And at any one time there will be many people who have found some type of fulfilment and balance of these needs within the environment that an organisation offers. They will have found some type of equilibrium where their learning functions in such a way as to meet the level of challenge each person requires for their psychological comfort.

Then change comes along and change disrupts this equilibrium. But the change will affect people very differently according to how it affects the four needs described above. Different responses to change lead to different learning states. The following table shows three most common responses or learning states according to how the four needs are affected by the change. They are ‘ideal types’ and people will vary in the extent to which they manifest each learning state. People may exhibit elements of all three depending upon what goals they are pursuing, how the change evolves over time and the different sets of needs they have.

<b>Learning Drive</b>	<b>How Affected – Learning State</b>		
	<b>Visionary Learning</b>	<b>Adaptive Learning</b>	<b>Dissonant Learning</b>
<b>Goals</b>	The change will help learner achieve important goals	The learner sees that she will be able to meet important goals if she learns to adapt effectively	The learner feels it is unlikely that his goals will be achieved by means of this change
<b>Values</b>	Change values are totally in line with personal motivational and/or idealistic values	Change values are either in line with personal values or are tangential to them hence irrelevant	Change values are at odds with personal values
<b>Self Esteem</b>	Self esteem is boosted by role in the change	Self esteem has the potential to be boosted by the change	Self esteem is diminished by the change
<b>Psychological Comfort</b>	excited, optimistic, energetic, enthusiastic	cautious, hopeful, determined and somewhat nervous	conflicted, dissonant, anxious, confused and unhappy

It is important to point out that these are NOT learning styles. They are states of mind and we may experience all of them according to time, place and context. In a visionary learning state learners are enthusiastic and optimistic about the change. They see that the change will help them achieve some important goals and are hungry to learn whatever they can. However, when in a visionary learning state, learners may limit their learning to whatever appears to promote the values and goals whilst avoiding anything that could threaten them personally.

Those in an adaptive state of mind have to adjust to changes that someone else has brought in. They will have to adjust their goals, learn 'what works' in the new situation, face uncertainty and the challenge to self esteem presented by potential failure, and they will have to adapt to incorporate new priorities and values. Their learning is more focused and restricted to important factors that appear to be critical for success. They will not necessarily incorporate learning that meets other people's needs (such as their team's or other departments) if it is not necessary to achieve their goals. They are on the edge of their comfort zone already and do not wish to take on more than they can cope with or any new learning that might threaten their psychological comfort.

Dissonant learners are in the least enviable position. For them the change threatens their equilibrium without offering any means of regaining it. Everything they value – goals, understanding of their environment, self esteem, values and psychological comfort – is threatened by the change and at this point they cannot see a way of regaining it. This leads to extremely high levels of negative emotions which in turn leads to impaired sensemaking faculties. Because dissonant learners cannot see a way through the change to reach a new equilibrium, they will often shut out signals that suggest they have to change. Once they accept the need for change however, change can be radical. What do I really want? What are my values? What will really make me happy? Who am I and how can I regain a sense of self esteem? These are the types of questions liable to be asked by people experiencing a dissonant learning state. Everything is up for grabs in this new learning environment; everything will be challenged in order to find the new equilibrium.



These three different learning states are common during times of change. In addition to these however we have explored both the intrinsic learning state – undertaking learning for the sake of the mastery, fun, and enjoyment. When we are enjoying learning for its own sake, we may reach a ‘flow’ state (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990) losing our sense of self-consciousness and effort, becoming at ‘one’ with the activity.

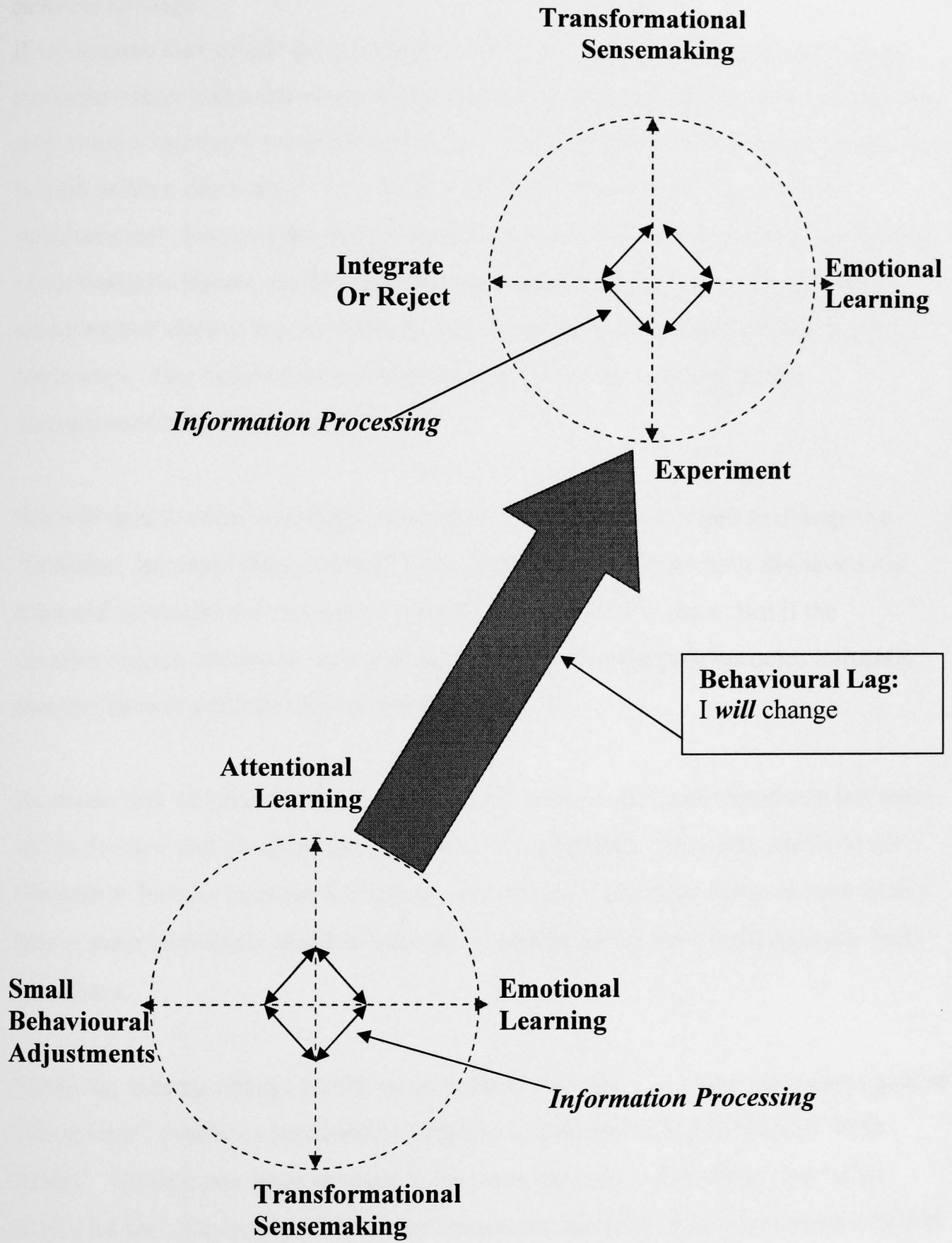
Incidental learning is learning we pick up without intending to. It is often tacit and it is often emotional. This is an area of learning that the research has not investigated in any great depth.

The research also highlighted four fundamental learning processes. These were discovered as being common to *all* learning experiences (unlike other processes such as declarative learning or vicarious learning). As a result the core learning cycle is said to comprise: focusing attention, experiencing emotion, sensemaking and taking action. However, these processes are experienced by everyone as they live their lives; they are the equivalent of living. As Kelly points out, they are not “something that happens to a person on occasion; it is what makes him a person in the first place”. These processes comprise ‘living’ but *they do not by themselves necessarily lead to learning*. Automatic Information processing is differentiated from ‘learning’.

*Learning as a process occurs only when connected to learning as an outcome.* If the processes outlined above do not lead to a specific learning outcome, they are not learning.

Even if we decide to enter into the learning process, the outcome will always be uncertain. Learning generates change which generates more learning. Learning is a journey where the process of striving for the destination tends to lead to unanticipated consequences. We depicted learning using the following model:

# The Learning Journey



We also explored the more detailed dynamics underlying schema, emotional and behavioural change.

### ***Schema Change***

If we assume that people are constantly striving to meet goals, support self esteem, maintain values and achieve emotional well-being, then at any one point in time, they may reach a relatively acceptable balance. Once this balance is achieved, people may be said to have discovered ‘what works’ for them – the underlying rules and structures and strategies that help each individual meet their needs in the world. But when the environment changes this formula starts to break down. The process of changing our schema begins when we can no longer meet our needs by acting in the same ways. Our behaviours and beliefs no longer work; we experience disconfirmation and dissonance.

We will tend to resist absorbing information that suggests we need to change our ‘formulas’ because change of this kind is dangerous. Once we have discarded old rules and strategies we may never rediscover adequate new ones. But if the disconfirmation continues such that nothing works and the pain becomes intrusive, then we have to enter the fray of learning.

As we do this we generate new hypotheses of ‘what works’ and tentatively test them out in the new and changing environment. Which hypotheses work, which do not? We search for new constructs, schemas, behaviours – anything that will work in this new system and which seems to adequately predict and control what currently feels like chaos.

However, schema change can be more positive than this. We may have a new goal or vision which makes us particularly receptive to new and changed ideas of ‘what works’. Given a new goal we have to discover not only ‘what works’ but ‘what works for me’, for example, ‘how can I assert my authority over a new team whilst at the same time remaining well-liked and popular?’

Once we enter the learning fray, previous changes in emotional orientation or behaviour can trigger further changes in schemas. One senses that once learning

begins there is no knowing where the individual will end up. And of course the individual may never discover what works for him or her in the new environment; there is the ever-present danger of losing everything.

### ***Changes in Emotional Orientation***

Again, changes in emotional orientation seem to reflect how events affect our self esteem, goals, values and psychological well-being. However, there is not always a direct relationship between the nature of the 'cue' and the resultant emotional orientation. Much will depend upon how the cue is processed – tacitly, simply or complexly. We process a 'cue' tacitly, when an event affects our needs in ways that we are unaware of. Generally speaking, with tacit processing, we will tend to generate emotional orientations towards cues according to whether they impact us positively or negatively. This is also true of simple processing, but in this case we are more aware of the process. In complex processing we tend to postpone the development of an emotional orientation until we have worked out the final meaning of the cue. Sometimes it does not help our goals if we dislike someone who threatens our self esteem. This someone may be a boss who has power to influence our career progression. In cases of conflict and complexity our sensemaking mediates the emergence of an emotional orientation.

Guilt and empathy appear to be powerful ways by which we change our emotional orientation towards cues. Once we pay attention to the objects of our guilt and empathy, we feel their pain and gradually change our emotional orientation towards the people involved. This may lead to changes in behaviour and in schemas.

### ***Changes in Behaviour***

Behaviour change occurs:

- following prior changes in goals, emotional orientation and/or schemas
- when we decide to 'test' our learning in the real world

Behaviour change often follows a pattern. The first stage is recognising the need to change. This involves changes in schema and emotional orientation: an intellectual and emotional acceptance that one's previous strategies no longer work in the

changed environment. In order to meet one's needs, one will have to change. The second stage involves an examination of fundamental understandings of one's own identity – 'do I want to change' and 'am I able to change'. If the individual decides to pursue the change, the final stage is the emergence of the 'will to change'. Even if the learner decides he needs to change, wants to change and is able to change there may still be blockages preventing the final change in behaviour (e.g. remnants of old dreams impossible to let go, fear of how the changes will unfold in the future, lack of self esteem or lack of energy). This delay in implementing behavioural change has been termed 'the behavioural lag'.

The final 'will to change' may come in the form of a boost to self esteem (creating a more positive vision of how things will turn out) or it may come in the form of 'the final straw' – an event that confirms the hopelessness of the current situation. This type of event may provoke anger which releases energy into the system.

Once the learner begins to change, she enters the experimental stage. She will assess what behaviours 'work for her' or 'feel right'. Eventually, she will integrate the chosen behaviours into her final repertoire – this is the integration stage.

This staged notion of behaviour change will differ according to the learning state. Visionary learners rapidly accept the need for change, clearly want to change and feel able to change. Hence they move quickly to the experimental stage. Adaptive learners accept the need to change but are often more cautious about changing their behaviour, carefully working out exactly what they need to do differently and limiting the changes to the arena where they need to perform. Dissonant learners often delay the recognition of the need to change. They may enter a highly emotional, anxious time while they work out what schemas have the most predictive power and whether they can or want to change.

Eventually, once they work out a new schema that seems to represent the changed world and their own places within it, they will change their behaviour. Often this behaviour change is radical – leaving their organisation, changing their career, changing their life style. This reflects the thorough and deep rooted revision of their identity they have experienced.

People also change their behaviour unconsciously in response to changes in emotional orientation. A sustained period involving increased or reduced self esteem via tacit processing will lead to changes in behaviour reflecting changes in motivation and confidence levels. High levels of guilt or increasing levels of empathy may also lead to behaviour change.

### ***Learning – A Spiral of Schema, Emotional and Behavioural Change***

Despite the fact that learning has been described here in a ‘staged’ manner, in reality all these forces are operating at once and one never knows how one will be affected or where one will end up.

There is a certain chaotic, unpredictable and even dangerous element to learning which plays a role in the strong human instinct to avoid learning.

## ***11.3 Discussion***

I have framed this thesis very specifically as contributing towards a new theory of learning. Existing theories have been comprehensively criticised from a number of vantage points and disciplines. So can the theory presented here address these mounting concerns whilst still providing a practical and elegant account of how managers learn and change?

The answer to this is ‘in part’.

It is clear that the theory presented here addresses some important concerns. Firstly it is not biased in favour of cognitive, behavioural or emotional processes or outcomes. Here we have a theory of learning that states categorically that it is impossible to understand any one of these elements without referring to the others. Learning emerges from the dynamic interplay between cognition, emotion and behaviour. If you are not studying all three, you are not studying the complete learning process. In this respect it is similar to and builds upon the work of Vince (1996; 1998; 2002),

and Fineman (1993; 1997). Much of the work here supports Fineman's views on the role of emotions:

“hunches, gut feelings, anger, resentment and love help focus and legitimize our cognitions; they stop them getting lost, or inform us when and how we are lost. They also get confused with thoughts. We have feelings about what we think and thoughts about what we feel (de Sousa, 1987; Smith and Berg, 1987; Gallois, 1993; Kemper, 1993)” (Fineman, 1997: 16).

So Fineman highlights the inextricability of thought and feeling. He also stresses the roles of shame, embarrassment and guilt in helping us to reach ethical judgements (1996; 1997). Whilst this thesis supports his emphasis on guilt and shame, Fineman stops short of exploring the dynamic role of these emotions in the promotion of personal change and learning. Fineman's primary interest is the broader role of emotion in organisations rather than the dynamics of learning per se.

The findings in this thesis are probably closest to the views of Vince, hardly surprising considering his psycho-dynamic background. We have spoken already about the role of emotions in promoting defensiveness; this is a view that is extensively explored by Vince (1996; 1998; 2002; 2004). We have also drawn upon Vince's reference to Claxton (1984) in support of the four drivers of learning (goals, values, self esteem and psychological comfort). There is much similarity between his views and the findings of this thesis. Vince stresses that learning is a struggle between risk and anxiety, courage and fear and how we handle those emotions will determine how we learn:

“At every opportunity for learning there are powerful emotions (such as fear and anxiety) that can either promote or discourage change” (1996:114)

“The struggle to learn and to change can be both complex and uncomfortable, involving strong feelings and prolonged uncertainty” (1996:114)

Vince too stresses the notion that we all “limit learning” to what is bearable:

“We can become defensive about ways of learning if they challenge what we are used to” (1996:113)

In particular he stresses how certain drivers limit our learning:

“The need to feel competent, consistent, in control and comfortable for ourselves and with others sets a boundary around our capacity to learn and change. This boundary is built as a protection against anxiety and uncertainty, a protection against the unfamiliar” (1996:113)

Where we differ with Vince is in the fusion between the cognitive, emotional and behavioural elements of the learning cycle. For Vince, the cycle of emotions is the prime driver of learning. It is how the learner handles his or her emotions (influenced by power structures enshrined in the group) that determines whether and how the learner will learn (1996:122). In fact both Fineman and Vince tend, like their cognitive and behavioural predecessors, to propose one *dominant* force in learning, in this case emotion:

“In general, it is increasingly accepted that emotions are the drivers rather than the side-effects of mental life. ‘Emotion is motivation’ (Gabriel, 2000)” (Vince and Saleem, 2004)

“Feelings and emotions are no longer seen as the by-products of work processes, but as a set of core processes (Gabriel, 1999) and it is recognized that ‘much of what we describe as rational is in fact emotional’ Fineman, 1996; 550)” (Vince and Saleem, 2004)

In fact there is an ambiguity in the role of cognition in learning. There is a tendency to frame rationality as ‘rationalisation’ i.e. as a defence mechanism:

“The everyday activities of organizational members tend to be defined and justified rationally; therefore there would be little value, for example, in privileging emotion in the study of organizations if doing so means ignoring how rationality is used in organizations to *block* emotions (Domagalski,



1999). One aspect of the interplay between emotion and rationality concerns how rational processes apparently transform emotions to make them (seem) manageable” (Vince and Saleem, 2004, my italics).

It is unclear how Vince and Saleem use the term ‘rationalisation’. Is this a defence mechanism, something to make threatening emotions appear rational or is this a rational interpretation of the information contained by the emotions (as suggested by Fineman in the first quotation above)? In fact this passage suggests that rationality is used to block emotions and hence block learning (an interesting and amusing twist on the typical argument that emotions block learning)! We see here the typical ambiguity regarding cognition common to so many psycho-dynamic practitioners and theorists, especially those from the Gestalt/Tavistock/group relations schools. Unlike the thesis here, psycho-dynamic theorists cannot resist the temptation to privilege one process (the emotional) above the others. However, we have seen that sensemaking is a vital part of the transformation process central to learning. Moreover, we saw how sensemaking often impacts the emotions experienced by the individual. Individuals may engage in the ‘complex processing’ of emotional cues. In this case the learner will consciously manage his or her emotional and behavioural response in accordance with the best way of making sense of the cue. This, according to Vince and Saleem, is **not** learning but simply a process through which rationality transforms emotions to make them more manageable. I disagree. Sensemaking need not be the equivalent of rationalisation; rather it is the process that helps the individual gradually change assumptions, beliefs, values and goals. Learning would not be learning without it. Where this thesis differs from Vince (and to a lesser extent Fineman, who has less to say about the process of learning) is in the importance ascribed to sensemaking in learning.

This theory also goes beyond the focusing on one or two learning processes in the study of learning. The learning cycle enables us, for the first time to explore the precise dynamics of learning in great detail. We know what to look for – emotions, sensemaking, attention processes and behavioural experiments – all linked to specific learning outcomes. We can seek out the process of behavioural change going from the first stage of ‘I need to change’ to ‘I want to change’ to ‘I can change’ to the final

‘I will change’. The cycle offers great promise in terms of providing a structure to study learning at its most intimate and profound levels.

In addition, the theory is able to distinguish between learning as a process and learning as an outcome and states that learning cannot be studied effectively unless both process and outcome are linked. It is only when outcomes and processes are linked that we are able to make meaningful distinctions between ‘learning’ and ‘information processing’ and ‘defensiveness’. Reflection, for example, is a process involved in all three – however, it only becomes a learning process when it leads to a learning outcome. This enables us to avoid problems associated with conflating terminology – reflection is not the same as learning, nor is the experience of emotion in the ‘here and now’. It also enables us to be much more precise by what we mean by learning – do we mean that people have developed a positive emotional orientation towards a training programme or do we mean that people have left that training programme and implemented profound behavioural change as a result of it? Students on an MBA programme may learn a new critical schema but is it utilised, accessed and enacted once they leave the course and enter the world of work?

The theory supports the centrality of ‘defensiveness’ in any theory of learning. Learning involves a choice – do I absorb this painful information and make the cognitive, behavioural and emotional adjustments that this implies, or do I shut it out and carry on using the habits I feel most comfortable with? The prevalence of defensiveness in everyday life, its power unconsciously to steer our thinking and our actions provides support for learning theories from Freud, to Rogers, to Argyris, to Vince. No theory of learning will be complete without a theory of defensiveness.

In addition, I hope to have pointed why and when people learn and why and when people put up defences to learning. We can see in the accounts so far that learning is never inevitable and defensiveness is always an option. Much depends upon the individual’s needs, emotions, values, goals and self esteem at the time. Much depends upon the extent to which the learning is construed as useful or indeed, necessary. It also depends upon how much energy the individual has to address the pain and exhaustion of learning; how much is the individual prepared to ‘face’ some of the unpleasant emotions associated with learning? This theory is able to account

for defensiveness and in fact often depicts the learning process as a series of forays into change and retreats into defensiveness, depending upon the type of learning described. Vital to this is the notion of the four drivers/inhibitors of learning which support work done by Erez and Earley, Claxton, Weick, Argyris and Vince.

As part of this explanation of defensiveness, the theory provides a powerful account of what we learn and why. In doing so it provides both challenge and support to the critical and postmodern agenda within the world of management education. We are suggesting that people learn in order to construct and develop an identity and in order to feel good and secure in their environment. This of course supports postmodern concerns with language, power and meaning. Identity and security are partly a function of culture and language. Whilst a unique individual will need to forge an identity that they feel comfortable with, a society at any one time will structure boundaries around the types of identities it will accept and reward. Moreover, the power to control mediational means such as language, continues to reinforce those boundaries throughout the life cycle of the individual. The challenge for the critical and postmodern agenda is how can they help managers to construct identities based upon values, ideas, philosophies and behaviours that are currently only rewarded in academia? What are the psychological, political and economic consequences of being a postmodern manager in a world that refuses to validate this identity?

This may be why students resist attempts by their tutors to shape their identity around a critical agenda (Perriton and Reynolds, 2004)? Not only does this identity not meet their needs, support their values, help them achieve their goals or build their self esteem, it is probably both psychologically and practically dangerous. This theory suggests that much of our learning is inherently self-interested. It is rooted in goals that are shaped by the society we either choose or find ourselves in. Learning, is often highly instrumental. People don't just learn anything.

Finally, the theory is not bound to a set of humanist, critical, post-Marxist or postmodern assumptions about human nature. The theory does not assume that people are always learning, nor does it assume that they are not. It does not assume that people are brainwashed and colonized by sets of managerialist discourses or that they need to be liberated from a false consciousness – on the other hand it does not

deny that this might indeed be the case. Its values and assumptions are centred on the psycho-dynamic notion that we are all subject to internal psychological forces some of which we are barely conscious of. It is these forces that are primarily driving our learning. This also helps to account for differences between group and individual learning. One of the most profound psychological forces is the desire to be accepted within a group. This desire is very capable of ensuring that an individual modifies his or her consciousness in order to comply with group norms. Hence for some, group learning can be conflated with individual learning. But others have needs for independence and control that supersede any desire to be accepted by a group. For them, group learning is definitely not individual learning.

Personally, I think these are powerful arguments in support of the theory of learning presented here. However, there are areas within the discourse of managerial learning that have not been addressed in this theory. These are issues associated with:

The role of the group (communities of practice) in learning and the concomitant de-emphasis of the self

The role of power in learning – in particular the ability of a powerful community of interests to shape the learning of the less powerful

The role of language in constructing the managerialist consciousness and the consequent exclusion of other truth claims.

These are serious areas that need to be addressed. Yet this theory is fully able to address them.

If we go back to the beginning of the research it was clear that I believed (and I still do) that we can only understand group, organisational, societal learning if we have a detailed understanding of individual learning. As a consequence of this assumption the focus of this thesis has been highly individualistic. This was a conscious decision and was taken in full awareness of alternative strategies that could have been adopted. I wanted to discover how the individual learned and adapted to change. I wanted to discover how the individual personally experienced change and learning. From then I

felt we could take the level of analysis a stage further. Future research can now look at how groups and communities learn, based on a firm understanding of how individuals learn and in full recognition that the two are different – overlapping and interdependent but different.

Having accepted that this was a legitimate choice – and indeed it would have been irresponsible to have addressed group learning given the state of the theory of individual learning – then we can take the findings here and begin to apply them to other contexts. Indeed it is easy to see how issues such as culture, language and power are represented and powerfully accounted for within the learning cycle.

The first step in learning is ‘paying attention’. I have stressed that we tend to pay attention to cues relevant to our needs. What seems abundantly clear, is that our culture and the power structures within that culture will have a strong hand in shaping how we ‘construct’ those needs. We are not born into the world wanting large cars, houses and foreign holidays (although some may be born with strong ‘needs’ for status). Our needs for self esteem may in fact be cultivated by a society that appears to value people conditionally according to their symbols of wealth. Kayes (2002) draws on Lacan in an attempt to ‘rescue’ experiential learning theory from its critics. Kayes’ integration of Lacan’s theory is relevant here. Presenting Lacan’s ‘L schema’ he goes on to describe the underlying theory:

“Individual development arises from the relationship between need, internalized representation, self-identification, and social interaction” (2002: 144)

“development begins with individual *need* (Es), which is a purely biological or emotional state. Being purely physical-emotional, need has no immediate form of representation, so it becomes represented in symbolic form through *internalized representation* (other). The internalized representation transforms the biological-emotional need in symbol, albeit an imagined and imperfect representation. Need and its internalized representation remain personal processes until they are exchanged with the social environment. This *social exchange* occurs as the internalized representation of need is organized

into a seemingly coherent identity. *Self-identification* (Ego) arises when the internalized representation takes on social face. Self-identification expresses the need by placing it within the symbolic framework of the social order. In this way, self-identification represents an ordering process, where needs are given coherence, location and meaning within the larger universe of language.” (2002: 144).

Kayes reference to Lacan provides an elegant reconciliation of the individual-social tension. The need that arises in the individual is ‘personal’, biological, unique. However, that need has to be given form and voice through the symbols and discourses of society. Furthermore, there is much that could be said about how western, individualistic, materialistic culture actually shapes and conditions these psychological needs. In addition, we could further explore how the dominant power groups have a hand in shaping the consumers of the future. This is not a sociological thesis and there is not the space here to explore these issues, but there is nothing in the theory of learning here that precludes the integration of these issues into the understanding of learning. What I am saying is that our needs, goals, values and identity are in fact at least partly socially constructed and done so within a context that is pre-figured and enacted by a dominant alliance of interests. As said before, society places boundaries around the types of identities it will accept, tolerate and reward. All of this affects our attention patterns, our emotions (how we feel about ourselves and our relationship to the world), our motivations, our sensemaking and our behaviour.

With regards to the emotional stage of the learning cycle it may be posited that we also ‘learn’ emotional responses to the cues and symbols of our society. We learn to feel ‘shame’ and ‘guilt’ when we violate existing norms and taboos. The dominant elites would have us experience pride and self esteem when we buy certain material goods. The whole advertising industry is based upon psycho-dynamic theories of deep unconscious desires and needs. In fact one of the founders of the modern approach to advertising was Edward Bernays, Freud’s nephew who introduced psycho-analysis into the advertising industry. Advertising (a classic meeting point of social construction and power) and emotional learning are strongly connected.

When we come to the sensemaking stage it is even clearer that we learn to make sense of cues within the discourses of culture and power. Certain paradigms are given to us and certain paradigms are obscured. We make sense of an Alfa Romeo through the discourses provided to us via advertising, magazines, newspapers, TV and other cultural delivery mechanisms. It is rare to make sense of an Alfa Romeo by reference to the ‘anti-globalisation’ or ‘green’ discourse. This discourse is often obscured and sidelined by the self-interested economic and political elites (Fineman, 1996).

When it comes to the behavioural element of the learning cycle, this too is amenable to a postmodern, critical or socio-cultural analysis. There are strong psychological rewards and taboos around specific behaviours which again are culturally distributed.

The learning cycle is amenable to both postmodern and critical views of learning. Moreover, it provides a structure whereby postmodern, social constructionists and critical theorists can explore the points at which society meets the individual, where language structures the identity, where power infuses the consciousness and where the hidden eludes recognition. Even more powerful, it provides a necessary and long awaited mechanism on which to build a grounded pedagogy – although a pedagogy that is forced to take cognisance of the individual’s construction of her own world based upon her own values and goals. The resultant pedagogy will have to be far more subtle and complex than that which exists currently.

In fact we can tentatively explore some elements of that pedagogy here. Let’s recall Kolb’s theory of life span development and learning (Kolb, 1984). This is an area that has received little attention or criticism but has the potential to provide an interesting way forward for critical and postmodern theorists.

Kolb proposed that we have different orientations to learning according to our stage in life. The first stage is the acquisition stage – where we acquire the basic structures of knowledge necessary to participate in our society. The second stage is the specialisation stage where we enter the world in order to forge an identity based upon a specific sphere of knowledge and expertise. This is the age when many academics and critical theorists meet their students. Students complain that academic

knowledge and a critical stance is not relevant to their needs (Czarniawska, 2003). This research would suggest they are right. They are entering the world in order to meet some complex needs, the most important of which is their need for identity. Without the fulfilment of this need, the individual is lost, unable to participate in a society where identity is no longer 'given' from birth but which has to be 'constructed' and earned. Without identity the individual is powerless to act. This is an issue recognised by Perriton and Reynolds (2004):

“would it be possible for you to embrace critical theories, brought by a teacher who pities managers in general? Would you be able to accept this from a teacher (who) hypothesizes the aspirations and the construction of your future identity?”

The enormity and power of this statement is revealed particularly when placed in the context of this research. It is not simply that critical theorists are aspiring to shape the identity of their students; it is also that the students are simultaneously and painfully trying to construct their own identity at the same time. At a time fraught with difficulties for students needing to construct identities that 'work' for them in the world of performativity, they are being influenced by people who do not inhabit this world or share its goals or values. What works for critical academics with their vastly different values simply does not work for young people wanting to forge an identity in the world of managerial work. The attempts of academics to shape this identity construction in ways that do not function in the workplace places them in opposition to their students – their students are right to dismiss these exercises of power.

The last stage in Kolb's theory is that of 'integration'. This supposes that the individual has successfully forged her identity and is motivated to explore those issues that were necessarily ignored or suppressed in the process. The successful 'career woman' is attracted to 'motherhood'; the CEO begins to explore how to 'give something back'. If Kolb is right, maybe this is the time when critical notions of power, leadership and social responsibility converge with managers' personal goals and needs to explore these 'hidden' or ignored issues. This implies that critical and postmodern academics are addressing the wrong audience. Perhaps it is time for them to address the powerful and successful managers and leaders that they obviously



feel so conflicted towards. This would be a learning challenge for critical academics that would involve changes in their goals, identity, self esteem, psychological well-being and values. It would be interesting to see if critical theorists would take on this challenge to learn, or whether they are meeting their own needs too adequately and too comfortably within the MBA and undergraduate classrooms of academia.

In sum, we have only just begun to explore the power and application of this new model of learning. There are many future avenues for further research that could be explored. At the individual level we need to see if the model helps to facilitate and deepen learning. We need to understand more clearly the role that goals, values, self esteem and psychological well-being play in learning. It would be useful to explore in greater detail the role of guilt and empathy in facilitating change, this is particularly relevant to postmodern and critical approaches to learning.

At the group or community level future research could explore the inter-relationship between individual and group; how the group influences attentional, emotional, sensemaking and behavioural elements of the learning cycle; how the learning states translate to the group level.

For critical and postmodern researchers there is a new agenda to develop pedagogies that take account of how individuals learn in the workplace, looking at how power and language influence the learning cycle and how the learning cycle can be accessed in order to inculcate a more critical, philosophical and responsible stance in the world.

As with any good theory, there is much more to learn!

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## Appendix One

**Table One: Attention Patterns of Each Diarist: Learning Domains and Number of Mentions**

### *Scientific Solutions*

<b>Communication</b>	SS	JG	KM	AG	RT	SB	CK	PR	TH	JB	CS	MS	SP	total
Communication processes	15				4	1	1	1			1	2	1	26
Presentations	11	5			2		1		7					26
Meetings process	5			7	11									23
<b>People</b>														0
staff issues	13	14	6		7		8					20		68
morale/climate						2	8	1		9	3		8	31
Staff retention	5													5
Understanding ppl			4		1		10		7	1		2		25
Relationships + Support							18	5		5	13		6	47
Influencing			16		5		5				4	4	2	36
<b>Self</b>														0
Feelings	14	23	21	42	8	13	22	42	22	40	31	12	40	330
Self Esteem				17		3	9	4	4		4	2	3	46
Self concept		4	3	8	2		9	3			4	3	1	37
My performance or competence	4	10		5	16		3	5	11	9	2	13	5	90
My goals				5										5
My skills								11			3		2	16
My behaviour			12	26	10	3	12	11	5	4	9	7	4	103
My role/career			4	27	4	12		46	2		9	2	11	117
How I am regarded			2	5		4		3		1	2	2	2	21
My values						10	9	8					8	35
My motivation								8					4	12
Control			5					2			2			9
Processes + Outcomes	13	9		7	5	11		2	6		3	1		57
<b>Selling, Customers</b>														0
Selling	5								12	1	4			22
Customers							14	7	7	17	3	13	22	
marketing - sales opps		10					9	12		5	3		3	44
New work/deployment						8		5		6	10		2	31
<b>Senior Mgt</b>														0
(influencing) snr mgt	2	6	13	3	1	1					2	14		42
leadership						2								2
<b>Peers</b>			9	9	3					8	2	5	5	41
<b>Mgt &amp; Org</b>														0
The organisation eg culture			13	7		13	8	9		3	3	2	9	67



<b>Peers</b>										0
Behaviour		14					3			17
peer values		11								11
competence		14								14
helping peers		3					3			6
general		8	8	4	8			17		45
<b>Mgt &amp; Org</b>										0
BEM	11	3	2		1				7	
The culture	2							3		5
Change	12		6	3	2		5	2		30
my boss	10	3		4	8		1	7		33
Management/snr mgt	10			5			6	8		29
structure	8									8
process mgt	8	3	4					3		18
politics								2		2
the organisation								5		5
Finances/bus perf										0
Professional interests		8	15				4			27
<b>Family</b>		4	7	1		1	3			16
<b>The learning process</b>	5	2	3	2	6	2	3	10		33
	JE	BF	BB	AS	WP	PF	DS	IG		

## Appendix Two

### *A Comparison of the Diarists' Expressed Goals, their top three or four Learning Domains and their Learning Outcomes (Taken from the Learning Biographies)*

	attention	Goals and values	Learning Outcomes
SS	communication presentations staff Processes and outcomes	competence and recognition harmony charismatic leadership supporting and respecting ppl challenge clarity and simplicity g – to be successful	1. Increased confidence 2. Changed constructs re SS 3. New Self Concept 4. New constructs re how to run a different business 5. New values – questioning bureaucracy of SS
IG	staff my perf marketing and selling	supporting people growth of bus, and people customer focus g – gain external experience, exp operating at senior levels and strategic thinking	1. changed schema of salesperson 2. changed self concept as sales person 3. new selling behaviours 4. increased self confidence regarding selling 5. increased confidence re operating at board level 6. new schema of fellow directors and politics
KM	influencing infl snr mgt organisation boss my behaviour	decisiveness and task focus change control and autonomy impact logic change the culture (more commercial) gain autonomy to make and implement bus strategy operating at board level	1. New goal – desire to feel passionate about work 2. Change self concept 3. Change construct re SS senior management 4. Changed behaviour and emotional orientation towards direct reports 5. Changed emotional orientation to SS
AG	my role/career my behaviour my performance self esteem	development – people and org personal learning and growth innovation and change To learn how to “go for it” and not let my personal barriers get in the way - I tend to devalue myself quite a lot of the time  “To position myself within AEA to achieve more of my objectives of i. change management ii. people development management.”	1. changed self concept – <i>more capable of being consultant</i> 2. changed emotional orientation to self – <i>lower self esteem</i> 3. changed emotional orientation to SS – <i>reduced commitment and energy</i> 4. New self concept – ‘selfish’ 5. New behaviours - <i>to overcome ‘selfishness’</i>
RT	processes and outcomes my behaviour meetings/workshops processes	goals – retirement travel having a role that is interesting and motivating	1. Changed schema, emotional orientation, behaviour and values towards ‘difficult colleagues’ 2. changed goals and emotional orientation regarding work 3. New schema, behaviours and self concept regarding ‘learning’ and ‘reflection’
SB	my role/career organisation culture my values	teamwork aimed at helping society standing up to corporate centre personal recognition being in touch with people’s concerns openness and honesty stability and security	1. Change constructs and emotional orientation to SS 2. New goals – to leave; to build new future with new company 3. New Self concept and increased self esteem

		g – growing the business retirement	4. Changes behaviour – leaves company
CK	relationships and support customers my behaviour	relationships living in the moment honesty and integrity people orientation g – keeping my job	1. Changed e.o. to client and to SS 2. New constructs regarding new business and customer relationships 3. Increased confidence regarding new technical areas 4. New self concept regarding good customer skills

PR	my role/career my performance my skills my behaviour the org culture	coaching contributing to society longer time frames deep technical problem lifestyle teamwork g - to find a new career direction	1. New constructs around 'motivation' and 'work' 2. Changed goals around work 3. Changed behaviour – leaves work 4. Changed emotional orientation to work
TH	selling my performance	variety and challenge profile brightness making a difference working with a team cutting edge g – new product/business development	1. New behaviours in customer communication 2. Increased confidence in customer communication 3. New schema, increased confidence and new behaviours re marketing 4. new schema and goals regarding how companies operate 5. new constructs around 'learning'
JB	customers my boss management morale	family people customer focus g – work life balance	1. New technical schema derived from R project 2. changed schema and emotional orientation regarding management (derived from R project) 3. new schema regarding project management (from R project) 4. New behaviour – presentation on what can be learned from R project
CS	relationships my performance my boss deployment my behaviour my career	relationships open communication prof competence g – establish her competence career development	1. changed schema, emotional orientation and behaviour to manager 2. changed schema, emotional orientation and behaviour to work 3. New schema, changed self concept and behaviour regarding 'professional relationships at work'
MS	staff issues customers influencing snr mgt	building team spirit helping people build up a fire team sell risk scale	1. new constructs regarding 'building the fire team' 2. new constructs regarding 'risk scale'
SP	customers my role career organisation management	professionalism, competence and respect openness and integrity g – to find a mentally stimulating career niche to maintain lifestyle	1. Increased self esteem 2. New behaviour – divorce 3. changed emotional orientation to job 4. changed behaviours re job
JE	infl snr mgt change BEM the board/snr mgt boss customer	fairness and openness involvement developing people integrity – living the values, walking the talk logic and intelligence g - establish a professional managerial culture (byimplementing his values) develop the depot and its people to help gain employment at new depot put the depot on the map	1. New schema, emotional orientation and behaviours regarding new vision for business 2. Changed schema, new and changed behaviours and emotional orientation regarding influencing upwards
BF	my behaviour peers' behaviour processes and outcomes peers' performance values staff peers' style & approach	integrity – walking the talk fairness honesty perfectionism competence – 'I am worthy' task focus g- to be seen as competent and respected a new challenge	1. changed emotional orientation and behaviour to recipients of change 2. New constructs and values regarding how to manage change 3. Changed self concept and self esteem

BB	<p>professional interests time management My behaviour Self esteem</p> <p>my role/career Peers Processes &amp; outcomes Family Process mgt/change</p>	<p>involving and motivating people teamwork competence - doing the job well professional development helping people being liked, conflict avoidance g – time management assertiveness move into industry</p>	<p>1. changed emotional orientation and behaviour to recipients of change 2. New constructs and values regarding how to manage change 3. Changed self concept and self esteem</p>
WP	<p>my performance my career my behaviour self esteem skills processes and outcomes boss, snr mgt, peers, staff</p>	<p>Professionalism Prof development Respecting and helping people 1. To be successful and get promotion 2. Power 3. To acquire knowledge to gain promotion</p>	<p>1. Changed self concept, values and schema re 'professional management' 2. New schema regarding 'how to get on' 3. Changed schema and emotional orientation towards senior managers</p>
PF	<p>staff issues technical issues my performance my behaviour self esteem suppliers understanding people processes and outcomes</p>	<p>1. To get the workshop operating more efficiently – to prove he can make the transition</p> <p>1. Achievement 2. Perfectionism 3. People 4. Being positive</p>	<p>1. new self concept – I have important skills</p>
DS	<p>staff performance processes and outcome staff issues</p> <p>My performance my behaviour</p> <p>staff morale</p>	<p>1. family 2. integrity, not arse licking 3. motivating others</p> <p>1. to gain more knowledge 2. to get on (career progression) 3. to develop staff</p>	<p>1. Changed emotional orientation to self – greater self confidence, less fear and defensiveness. Confident in decision making</p>
IG	<p>my role career my performance peers my skills self concept my behaviour understanding others</p>	<p>change and variety challenge and progression personal growth treating people with respect achievement</p> <p>to seek out challenge through career progression</p>	<p>1. changed emotional orientation to self – greater self confidence and self esteem – more decisive 2. A sense of personal growth</p>
AS	<p>self concept senior mgt understanding others my career peers relationships boss</p>	<p>1. Helping people – listening, supporting, counselling 2. Motivating people by treating them with respect 3. Gaining and giving commitment 4. Harmony</p> <p>1. To carry on achieving</p>	<p>1. changed schema as to how to help others 2. changed schema as to how to manage her career – to have goals 3. changed goals for future – to go into HR</p>

### Appendix Three

## The Links Between How a Cue Affects the Drivers of Learning and Subsequent Changes in Emotional Orientations

### Scientific Solutions

<i>Diarist</i>	<i>How the Drivers of Learning are Affected c.f. Learning Biographies</i>	<i>Learning Outcome - Change in Emotional Orientation towards.....</i>
Sandy Simmonds	a. goals – is successful in meeting goals b. self esteem – receives good feedback from valued bosses and peers	1. Self – more confidence
	a. goals and self esteem – is successful in dealing with conflict situations b. happiness, self esteem – feedback indicates to her that experience of conflict does not undermine her “core”: “my core’s OK; I’m alright” (i/v 2)	2. Conflict – more confidence
	a. motivational values – Sandy has high needs to be liked. She absorbs a new emotional orientation to SS due to her need to empathise with/be liked by people in her new Canadian business who are critical of SS.	3. SS – more critical
John Gray	a. values – by attending a training course, John reframes his perception of selling to be more in line with his values (selling is helping vs. manipulating) b. self esteem, goals - once he has done this he can see that he is competent within the new selling paradigm. Also he has a success that reinforces his competence together with some “stunning feedback”.	1. Selling – more positive emotional orientation and more confidence
	a. goals – he experiences success	2. Operating at senior levels – more confidence
	a. values – John spends a lot of time ‘assimilating’ the constructs and schemas of senior directors. Once he feels competent in this area however he learns to ‘differentiate’ his views from those of others around him by exercising his values. He begins to judge the behaviour of his seniors and peers, realising that they are not always ‘good and right’ and sometimes he is!	3. Some senior directors – they are not as competent and do not behave with as much integrity as he originally might have believed
Kay Mendes	a. goals – Kay learns that she will not meet her career goals in her role	1. Role – more negative, depressed
	a. goals – Kay attributes her lack of success in meeting her goals to management incompetence b. values – management treat her and others in a way that is not in accordance with her values, provoking much anger	2. Senior management – more angry, judgemental, dismissive
	a. empathy – Kay is driven to help those lower in the hierarchy. As she gets to know them more and as her changed behaviour works she feels more kindly and tolerant towards them.	3. People lower in the hierarchy – more tolerant
Alex Gray	a. goals – Alex experiences a number of successes in her role and is able to learn from some of those experiences that do not go well. From this she feels more capable of becoming an OD consultant. At the same time however... b. self esteem - Alex interprets many incidents in a way that makes her feel that she as a person is not valued, respected or recognised. The lack of confirmation of her being outweighs the reinforcement of her competence.	1. Self – reduction in self esteem whilst at the same time believing that she is more competent
	a. being. Not being valued by her bosses and peers undermines her commitment to the role and the organisation.	2. Organisation & role – less committed



**The Links Between How a Cue Affects the Drivers of Learning and Subsequent Changes in Emotional Orientations**

**Scientific Solutions**

<b><i>Diarist</i></b>	<b><i>How the Drivers of Learning are Affected c.f. Learning Biographies</i></b>	<b><i>Learning Outcome - Change in Emotional Orientation towards.....</i></b>
Rob Tyler	a. goals – Rob sees how a personality tool (MBTI) can help him get on better with his boss. b. values and being - As he begins to think more about what makes people tick, he gains a sudden insight that he is prejudiced against certain of his colleagues. He is shocked by this revelation and how it contradicts his own self concept. This triggers an intense learning experience and reorientation of his attitudes towards other people.	1. Difficult colleagues – more accepting 2. Psychological tools – sees how they can help him.
	a. Rob is diagnosed with cancer and undergoes a serious operation. This changes his emotional orientation to work and life in general.	2. Work – decline in motivation as a result of serious illness
Steve Black	Values – a series of decisions implies that the company is taking a short term, profit (versus people) orientation to business development which offends Steve’s values. The final breaking point comes when Steve hears that management feel Steve is blackmailing them (in contrast to Steve’s view that he is offering them a chance to keep him). He is greatly offended and angered by this and hence confirms his negative attitude towards the company.	1. Company – decline in commitment to SS; becomes highly critical.
	self esteem – Steve’s self esteem is not high in SS as he does not feel valued, recognised or respected. Hence he has a great shock when, on attending a recruitment fair, he receives massive positive feedback about how valuable he is to a number of companies.	2. Self – increase in self esteem
Tim Howes	goals and self esteem – Tim practices new skills and is successful & appreciated in terms of the feedback he receives	1. Self – increased confidence regarding selling 2. selling – more positive
	self esteem – gains experience in areas outside his normal practice and sees that he is competent	1. Self – increased confidence regarding his general abilities
	a. values – Charles really enjoys the company of this customer. Instead of a “chore” entertaining becomes fun. He is in the company of like-minded people who reinforce his being. b. Goals – the customer also helps Charles in furthering his career	2. Customer – increased positive orientation
Paul Richards	self-esteem – having never felt valued in his work Paul had always put this down to lack of competence. A new schema enabled him to attribute his lack of interest to ‘job fit’ vs. ‘lack of competence’. This boosted his self esteem to the extent that he left the company and took a year’s sabbatical.	1. Self – increased self esteem 2. Job - increased confidence and determination to find a better job
Jim Barnes	self esteem – Ian’s project had gone disastrously wrong and knocked his self esteem based upon competence. However, the fact that management supported him as opposed to blamed him changed his emotional orientation towards management. He appreciated their reinforcement of his being, despite such a public and costly mistake.	1. Management – more positive orientation

<b><u>Diarist</u></b>	<b><i>How the Drivers of Learning are Affected c.f. Learning Biographies</i></b>	<b><i>Learning Outcome - Change in Emotional Orientation towards.....</i></b>
Sally Peters	<p>self esteem – a number of incidents are construed as eroding Sally’s “self esteem and self confidence”. This is not to do with her competence but with how she is treated by her management and the lack of validation she receives.</p> <p>This causes her to disengage from her job (“It doesn’t matter”; “I still don’t care”) and she starts looking for another role in another part of the Group. It is only once she has “let go of the security blanket”, found a new job that her self esteem increases. In her new role she is valued and respected.</p>	<p>1. Self – decreased followed by increased self esteem</p> <p>2. Job – decreased commitment</p>
	values – Sally is treated in ways that offend her own values. This leads her to become more and more critical of management	3. Management – more critical and angry towards them
Carys Sale	emotional well-being – Carys manager forces his attentions onto her causing her much unhappiness at work	1. Manager – decreased trust, increased fear
	<p>a. self esteem – she feels that any prior support he gave her was based upon him pursuing a tacit agenda and not based upon his assessment of her competence</p> <p>b. self esteem – she is not valued or appreciated at work and no-one supports her; she is isolated and has no work to do. She feels “am I not doing what I need to be doing or has no-one defined what needs to be done?”</p>	2. Decreased self esteem

**Appendix Three: The Links Between How a Cue Affects the Drivers of Learning  
and Subsequent Changes in Emotional Orientations**  
**Logical Logistics**

<b>Diarist</b>	<b>How the Drivers of Learning are Affected c.f. Learning Biographies</b>	<b><i>Learning Outcome - Change in Emotional Orientation towards.....</i></b>
Jim Eddy	<p>a. Values - Jim's vision for the business supports all of his values and this is constantly being reinforced and successful</p> <p>b. self esteem and goals – as Jim's vision is reinforced he becomes more visible in the company, gaining reinforcement from senior managers via promotion and recognition of his work</p> <p>c. self esteem – Jim's successes reinforce his sense of competence</p> <p>d. Goals – Jim's successes help him to meet his goals</p>	1. Role – increased excitement, determination and optimism
	a. Values – Jim's interaction with people at senior levels together with a new power paradigm enables him to exercise his own judgements regarding their behaviour. He realises that it is not competence that is at stake here but values	2. Senior Management – less respectful
	a. Empathy – Jim learns through the experience of guilt and empathy to see the world through the eyes of his direct reports as they go through change. This helps change his emotional orientation towards them.	3. Direct Reports – more tolerant
Bill Fineman	a. self esteem and values – Bill had a difficult childhood which left him with very low self esteem. Over the year he experiences high levels of success and achievement. This leaves him with a high sense of his own competence but also a high sense of his low self worth. This together with his increase in power and influence which he exercises in a way that causes him to feel guilty (he hasn't been 100% honest) causes him great confusion and emotional turmoil.	1. Self – increased confusion and concern re self esteem issues
	<p>a. Empathy – Bill learns through the experience of guilt and empathy to see the world through the eyes of his direct reports as they go through change. This helps change his emotional orientation towards them.</p> <p>b. self esteem – it is Bill's own feelings of low self worth that spark his guilt and empathy for his direct reports. He asks the question 'who am I to be putting them through this?'</p>	2. Direct Reports – more tolerant
Will Payne	<p>a. self esteem – Will's competence is called into question via a 'development' exercise based upon highly challenging feedback. (decreased self esteem)</p> <p>b. values – he cannot avoid the feedback and is forced to question the values that have driven his behaviour beforehand</p> <p>c. self esteem – having felt that he had 'grown' as a result of this experience (increased self esteem), he felt personally rejected when his manager did not give him a place on the senior management team (decreased self esteem)</p>	<p>1. Self – decreased then increased and then decreased self esteem</p> <p>2. Manager – increased negative orientation</p>

<b><u>Diarist</u></b>	<b><i>How the Learning Drives are Affected c.f. Learning Biographies</i></b>	<b><i>Learning Outcome - Change in Emotional Orientation towards.....</i></b>
Ann Smart	Goals – Ann’s belief that she would inevitably progress up the career ladder are contradicted when she loses her place on the senior management team only to find herself in a new role that she does not enjoy. values – she reflects upon her identity, what she enjoys and wants from life. Through this she identifies a new career direction.	1. Role – decreased self esteem following by new feelings of independence; increased confidence in her ability to find a new career
Ben Baker	a. values – gains sense of fulfilment when in engineering role and lack of interest when in management role. As a result chooses to pursue career in engineering b. self esteem – gains a sense of competence in engineering role	1. Self – increased confidence 2. Career – increased confidence
Dan Smith	values – previous manager who had different values and did not respect him, left self esteem and goals – experiences a series of successes in his new role	1. Self – increased confidence, less fear and defensiveness
Peter Foot	self esteem and goals – experiences a series of successes in his new role	1. Self – increased confidence
Ian Brown	self esteem and goals – experiences a series of successes in his new role	1. Self – increased confidence and self esteem
	Values – Ian respects those people who live by similar values to himself; judges those who do not	2. Other specific people – decreased respect for some /increased respect for others

## **Appendix Four**

**Four diarists give feedback on what they thought of the learning biography**

**Tim Howes**

**Steve Black**

**Bill Fineman**

**Alex Gray**

## Learning Analysis - Your Views and Feedback

Having read the analysis I put together I am very keen to find out what you thought of it. In particular I would like your view of how accurate a picture it presented of your learning over that year (April 1999 - March 2000). Would you mind answering the following questions? Take as much space as you wish to answer them and please be as truthful and honest as possible - it will help me refine my methodology if you can! I know the section on 'what was not learned' is somewhat controversial and you may disagree violently with it!! It is simply my attempt to identify 'learning blindspots' which we all have. I feel my analysis will be more useful if we can identify areas where we do not learn as well as areas where we do - but you will have your own views about this. Once again many thanks for your patience and help.

1. What is your overall opinion of the analysis?

Phew! What a lot of analysis!

i) Some concern that in order to make something of the results, it could be "over-analysed" ie in parts something is made of small bits of information which in reality are "throwaway remarks" with no real deep underlying meaning

ii) Counterpoint to this is that certain conclusions "ring true" suggesting accuracy to the conclusions

2. What do you think about it in terms of accuracy?

As stated above, certain conclusions "ring true" suggesting accuracy to the conclusions – see also below

3. What were the most valid parts of the analysis?

"Tony is not particularly motivated at consciously reflecting and drawing out learning from a situation"

"action oriented"

"driven by goals" ..... leading to much tacit learning

"tends to analyse positive emotions more readily than negative ones"

4. What were the least valid?

"Tony only feels he has learned when he sees tangible results" – I see what you are getting at but this statement feels too strong. I would probably agree (which you say somewhere) that I am often only really interested / motivated by the results which the learning enables me to achieve.

You say that Tony is goal driven but then go on to say that the focus on *process* can lead to forgetting the original goal. This could be true, but initially seems a bit inconsistent (am I goal driven or process focussed?).

5. How could it have been improved?

You've got me on this one.

6. Did you learn anything from it and if so, what?

The motivation for learning gives cause for reflection (of course, being me, I'm not sure what this does for me.....how can I use this knowledge to get a tangible **result** for me.....)

I agree that I "tends to analyse positive emotions more readily than negative ones". This means there is more opportunity to learn if I am prepared to analyse the negative ones (though I'm still not sure that I want to....as you suggest my natural inclination is to move on and do it again a different way rather than to spend a long time in analysis)

Blind spot stuff is interesting. I agree that I did not pursue the development of myself in the role of a manager. I'm torn between thinking

- i) this merely reflects the management structure at the time (strong management chain between Dept manager and dept staff; very weak management link of team leader (ie me) in the middle).
- ii) there is a significant element of truth.....is this because it requires deep reflection and personal change, or no measurable outcomes etc as you suggest?

Funnily enough the management set up has now changed.....our DM is remote (London) so I have a much stronger managerial responsibility. It would be interesting to know if this has changed my style/area of learning.

7. What do you think it missed or lacked?

I can't pinpoint anything here.

8. Do you have any other comments that you would like to pass on or that you think might help in future analyses?

Good Luck for the future!!

Tony

## Learning Analysis - Your Views and Feedback

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1. What is your overall opinion of the analysis?

I felt that the analysis was surprisingly accurate. I made decision to leave the company I worked for. When I looked at the analysis it was obvious why I had come to the conclusions I had and made the decision I had.

2. What do you think about it in terms of accuracy?

I felt the analysis was in retrospect accurate.

3. What were the most valid parts of the analysis?

I felt that the identification of the widening gap between my values and that of the organisation was an accurate assessment of the development of my thinking.

4. What were the least valid?

I felt that although my departure was inevitable the analysis made the decision to leave too clear-cut. I don't think it considered my determination to make things work out.

5. How could it have been improved?

I felt that given the imprecise nature of this area there was little improvement that could have been made. It would have been nice to have carried out the analysis in a more stable environment but that was not the idea.

6. Did you learn anything from it and if so, what?

I think that I learned that I should have been less sentimental about the organisation and probably should have left earlier.

7. What do you think it missed or lacked?

Although I found it interesting I wasn't sure what was learned about learning. I guess I'll just have to wait on that one.



8. Do you have any other comments that you would like to pass on or that you think might help in future analyses?

I found it difficult to keep up with the diaries. It would be useful to have a computer application that would sit on your desk-top and prompt you once a week to type something in.

## Learning Analysis - Your Views and Feedback

Having read the analysis I put together I am very keen to find out what you thought of it. In particular I would like your view of how accurate a picture it presented of your learning over that year (April 1999 - March 2000). Would you mind answering the following questions? Take as much space as you wish to answer them and please be as truthful and honest as possible - it will help me refine my methodology if you can! I know the section on 'what was not learned' is somewhat controversial and you may disagree violently with it!! It is simply my attempt to identify 'learning blindspots' which we all have. I feel my analysis will be more useful if we can identify areas where we do not learn as well as areas where we do - but you will have your own views on this. Once again many thanks for your patience and help.

1. What is your overall opinion of the analysis?

I found the detail of the analysis most useful and it is in a very helpful format.

2. What do you think about it in terms of accuracy?

Your assessment of my situation at the time of the analysis is extremely accurate and has offered me a further insight into areas that I had not fully understood until now.

3. What were the most valid parts of the analysis?

All areas are valid and I found the analysis was most useful in helping me to reflect upon what has changed for me since that time and what has remained the same.

4. What were the least valid?

Whilst the childhood background detail was very valid at the time I have since come to realise that I had only revealed one layer of the onion and so at this point in time, whilst it remains valid it does not reflect where I am today.

5. How could it have been improved?

From the point of view of a layperson reading the document, a reduction in the use of jargon or a glossary of terms might be helpful.

6. Did you learn anything from it and if so, what?

I learn most from reflection and this document has offered another opportunity for this. In particular I am reminded that when one is in a change situation one should never assume that full understanding and commitment has been reached. Maintaining open communication channels and taking time to fully understand exactly what it is that will light an individual's candle is critical in leading people through change. Also I am reminded it is not wrong to lead and take decisions, nor is it wrong to consult. However there is a time and a place for both. The key is to be honest enough to admit when each is required and to be brave enough to tell people up front what the position is going to be before it occurs, in as far as you can.

7. What do you think it missed or lacked?

I think that there must be learning opportunities I have missed, but having missed them I don't know what they are!

8. Do you have any other comments that you would like to pass on or that you think might help in future analyses?

Not just at the moment. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to take part in this project.

Dec. 6 1999

Amende  
August 2002

Learning Analysis - Your Views and Feedback

Having read the analysis I put together I am very keen to find out what you thought of it. In particular I would like your view of how accurate a picture it presented of your learning over that year (April 1999 - March 2000). Would you mind answering the following questions? Take as much space as you wish to answer them and please be as truthful and honest as possible - it will help me refine my methodology if you can! Many thanks again for your help.

1. What is your overall opinion of the analysis?

Very accurate and insightful. Now I can use it to see how far I've grown since then, but also to see that some of the issues still lurk but in a very less dominant way.

2. What do you think about it in terms of accuracy?

As I read it, it rings very true.

3. What were the most valid parts of the analysis?

Competing schemas, emotionally dominated learning  
My concern with others "opinion" of me.  
"Selfish" concept - actually about being able to step outside myself - as I believe that to be a core competency of a consultant.

4. What were the least valid?

Nothing stuck out to me.

5. How could it have been improved?

I was constantly drawn to - so what strategies could I use to manage?  
but I realise that is not the purpose of the PhD!!  
Pictorial summary would have been good for me.

6. Did you learn anything from it and if so, what?

The narrowness of where I concentrate - miss out political, power, financial  
The importance of my coaching  
Distinction between valuing me for being a human being and ~~valuing~~ valuing me for what I do. I DON'T MAKE the distinction PTO

7. What do you think it missed or lacked?

A summary diagram.  
It is lots of words and the headings etc didn't help me to get an overall picture of where it was going (being an "N" !!!)

8. Do you have any other comments that you would like to pass on or that you think might help in future analyses?

## *Appendix Five*

**Diarists' summaries of their learning over the year: pictorial representations**

**Will Payne**

**Charles King**

**Alex Gray**

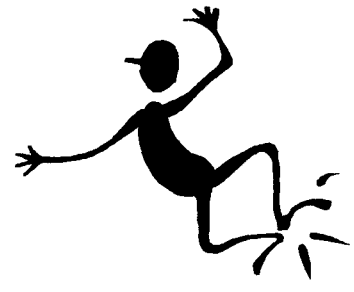
**Tim Howes**

**Ian Brown**

**Steve Black**

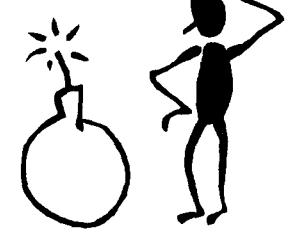
**Kay Mendes**

1.



Well Into New Role and start of Depot Change Process

10



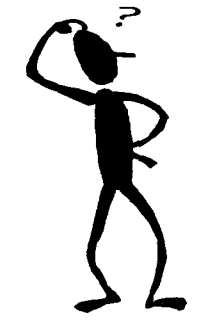
Changes confirmed new manager takes over reality kicks in.

9.



New SLT is formed. Causes rift in Old SMT and we break into own groups

8



Unsuccessful and lose motivation for work

2.



Asked to be seconded onto clients change project

11



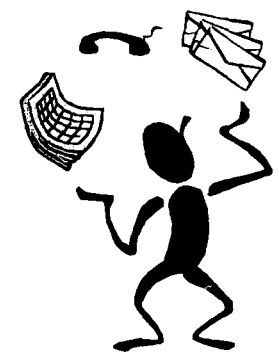
Feel I under achieved through the year and and no longer feel I belong to the team

7



New S & I Role becomes available.

3.



4 Months on Future Project. Developed High Level Management Skills

4



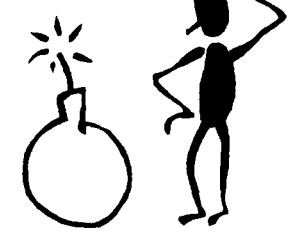
Realised I needed to change the way I manage and behave.

5



Through further training on future, style clearly changed, and opportunities seemed to be possible at my Site

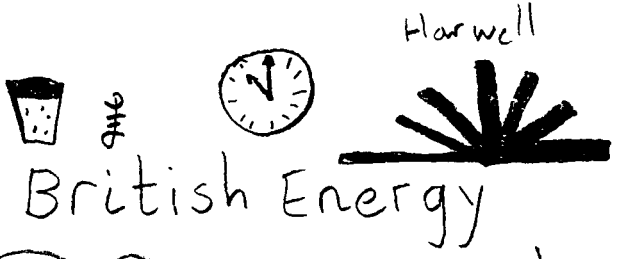
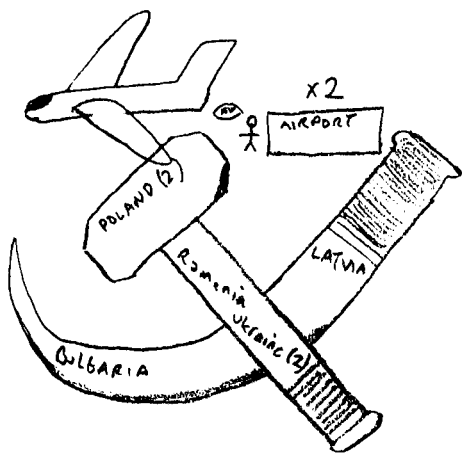
6.



Shared my change process with my GM

031

PRIME!



# Reflection on year.

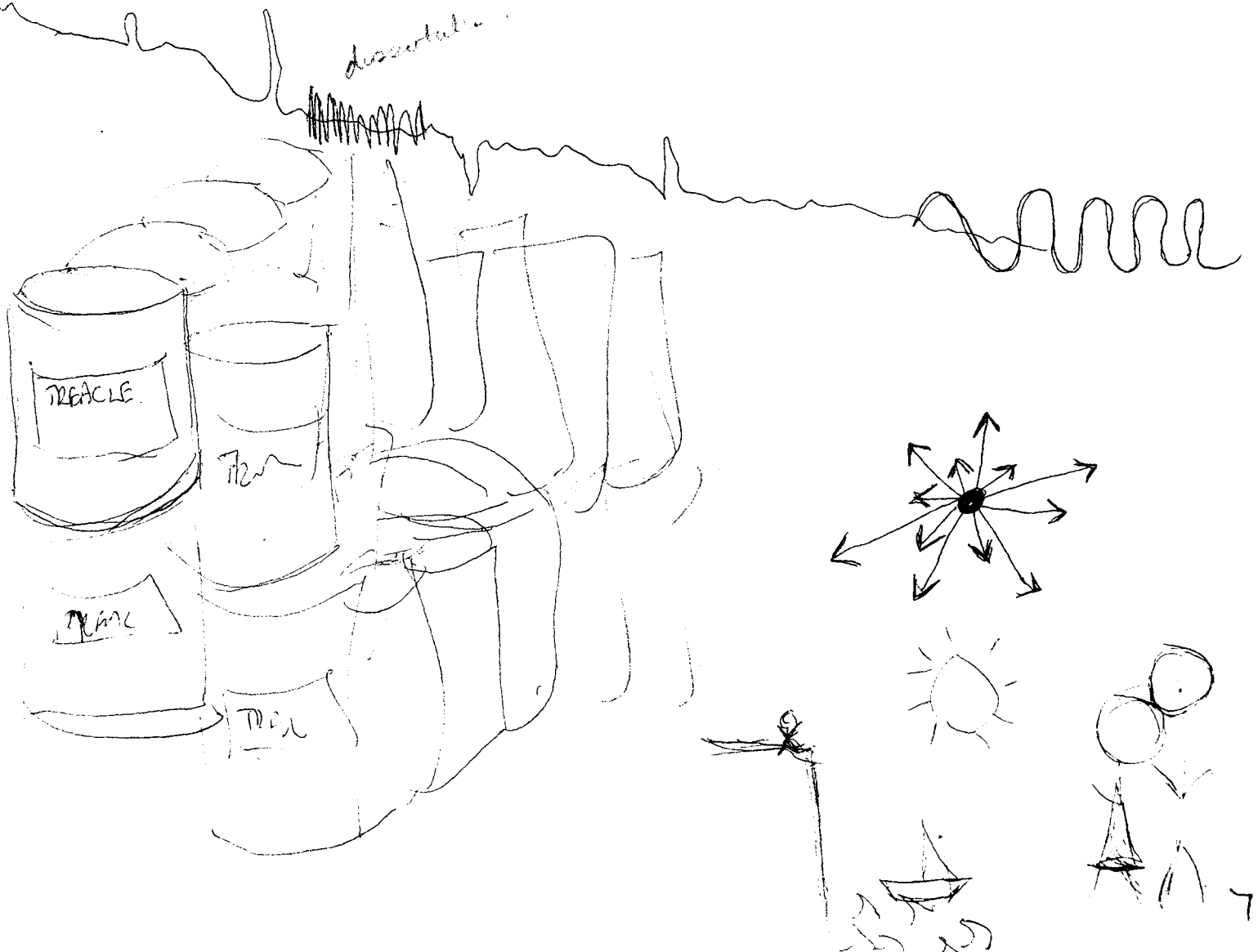
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Christmas

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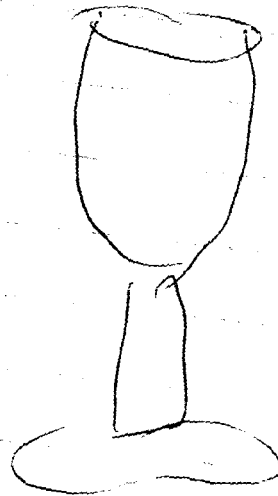
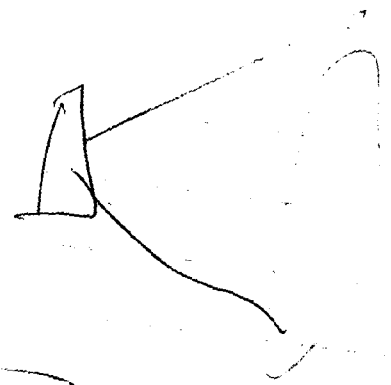
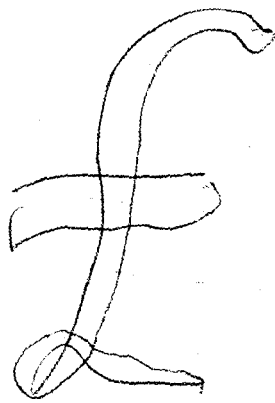
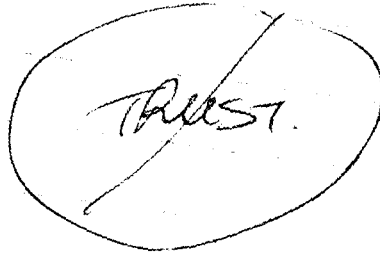
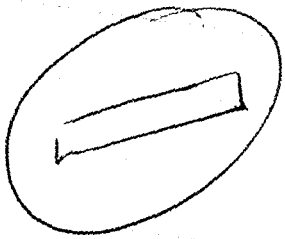
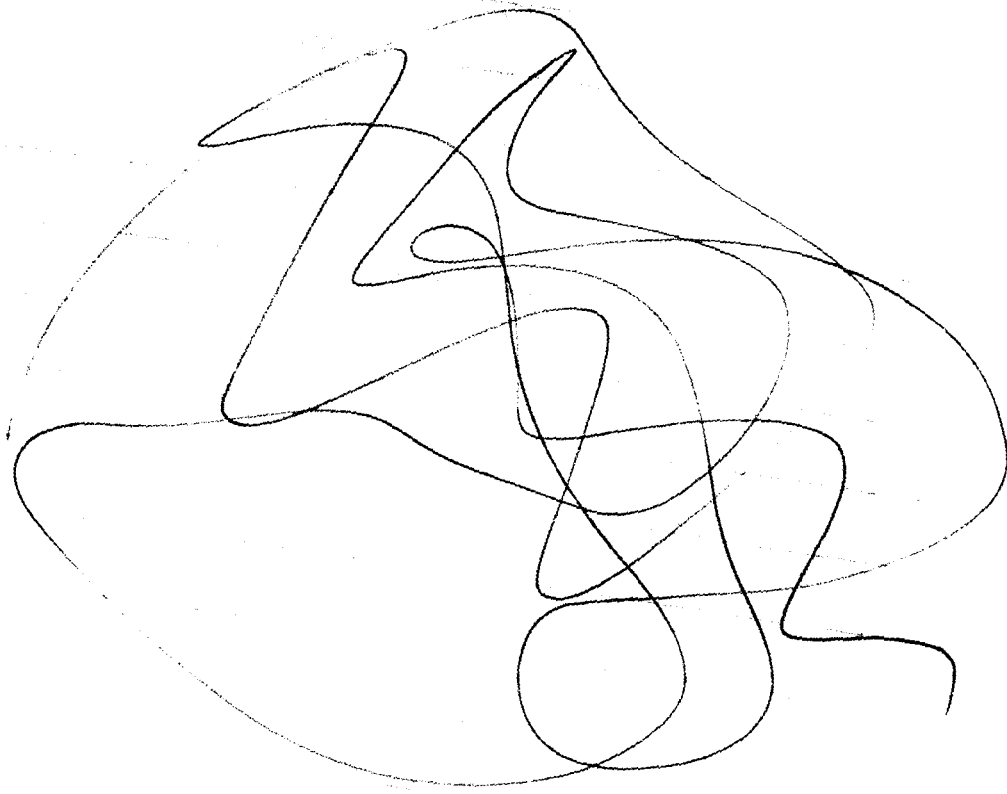
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PROJECT  
MANAGER

ANDREW COOPER

EXPERIENCE

PROJECT





Start FY

Finish FY - now.



